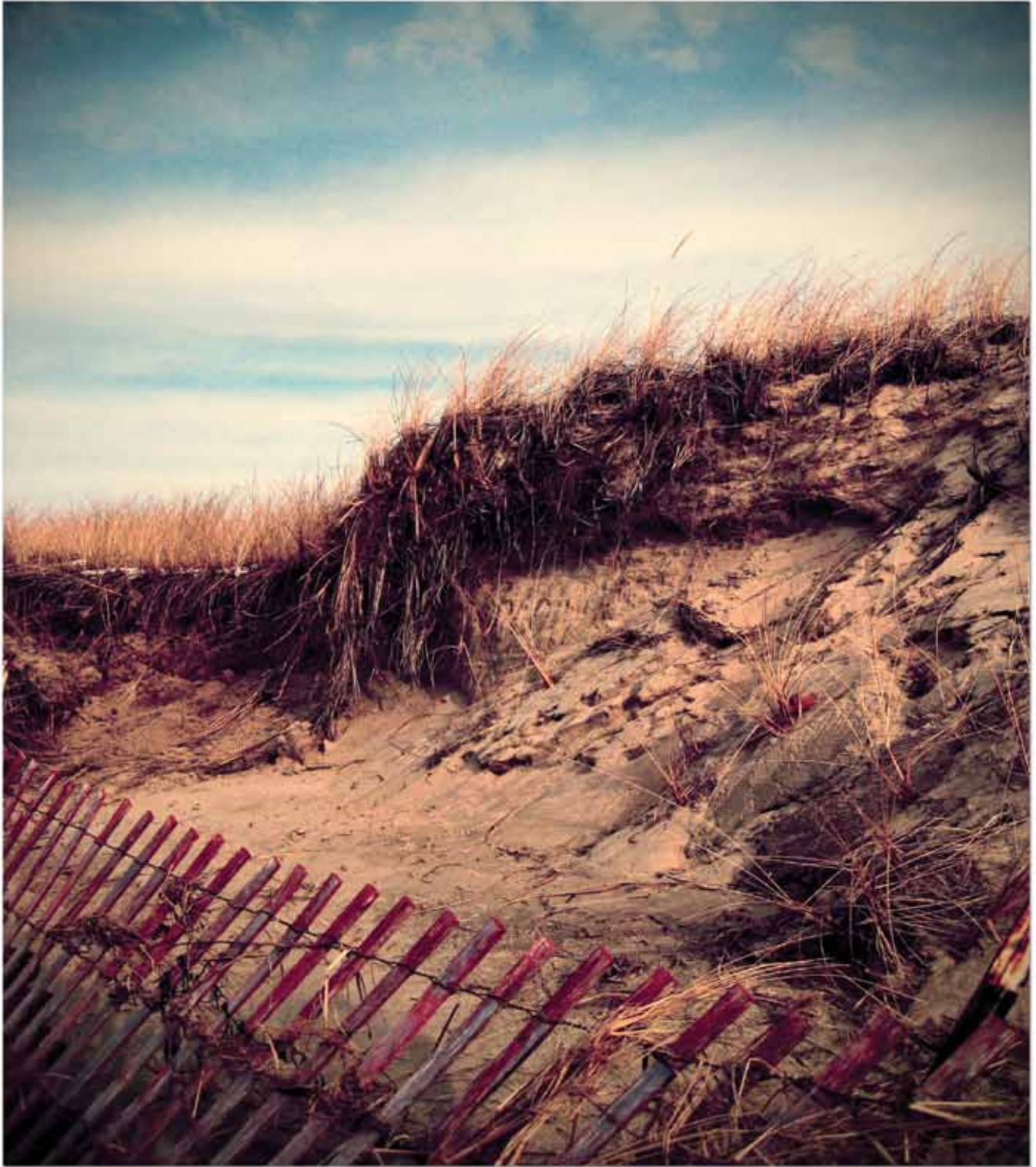


The Cenacle



16TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

NUMBER 77 | APRIL 2011

"Everybody knows
You only live a day
But it's brilliant anyway"



--Elliott Smith,
"Independence Day," 1998.

April 16, 2011
10:44 p.m.
Marriott Hotel at
Copley Place
Boston, MA.

Welcome to the 16th anniversary issue of The Cenacle. It amazes & humbles me to have been editor of this periodical for so long, & to be blessed with such gifted contributors. I look back over the years better to look around & ahead.

I began writing when I was still a child, & it became a way to imagine myself beyond my life's inadequacies. My family had little money, struggled with daily living & perpetuation. There is an art, even a poetry, in suffering, in deprivation, but I believed that after awhile the lessons are learned. No more subtleties or new angles. Just suffering, plain envy of others who have more. And why? Just because.

So I wrote because it was in my control, because it did not have the usual limits. It wasn't about

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my limitations, or that of my family, or anyone else's really. No. It was about possibilities. How far could I go? How good could I be? I didn't know & I eventually learned nobody else did either. This was excitement, not ego. Hope, not greed for acceptance. Mystery without end.

I think in writing, long have. Conversations are dialogues. The voices of loved ones, when inspired, sum to speech, to poetry. Art abounds everywhere, all around, at least possibly. If me, then you, then anyone in this hotel lounge, or the streets, across the world. Art is our native water, all of us, why the simplest of us yearn to music, why we dream anarchically every night, it is our great inheritance, it is why we are conscious. To make Art.

Pause. Look around.

I don't see a better answer. What I do see is discontent on all levels, & answers which often seem to delay happiness to some far day, if not till after death itself. Or answers that

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simply say: to be human is to suffer. One deserves it. Repent & then maybe... no, really... Answers that will bring happiness upon learning a code of conduct, mastering a behavior of denial & repentance, & so on.

I see Art as the answer because it is the simplest. Art acknowledges that the same set of hands can shape metal & wood to a statue or a rifle. It is possible to create nation-states & then craft reasons to cause them war with each other. Or choose peace, as though it is not always right.

I believe causing harm, conscious, need less harm, is always unnecessary. There is always a choice, another possibility. No human faith or polity is definitive, & therefore none is invulnerable to exploitation. We, each of us, can be tricked into causing need less harm to each other & to our world. It happens all the time.

Does not mean tomorrow isn't a new day. It is new, & next, both. Taken as such, one is able to remember,

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& keep moving. As my dear friend Burke has often said to me, we are what we were, but not what we shall become! Tomorrow is new, & next. It's OK.

Cause again. A breath is always good.

Publishing this periodical to me is an act of faith, my gesture of what I value to spend my hours with. Art is what I believe in, what I preach. What hope, what direction, what purpose.

I believe we create our histories, as individuals, & history, as a race, we shape & change & nothing is impossible. We stand in our own ways, & always have, as evidenced in every war, every slaughter, every needless harm of this miraculous living cosmos.

And yet. Tomorrow is possible & possible & possible. It's always now doing the writing, the creation. Now is the ultimate & perennial living work of Art. Feel it in your hands.

4/16/2011

The
Cenacle
16TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
NUMBER 77 | APRIL 2011

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NEW ENGLAND

2011

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Thanks to Bruce D. for helping me to see that there might be a place even in the daylight for using my capacities toward worthwhile ends . . . To Catfish Rivers and Zen and Reverend Dead for helping make SpiritPlants Radio the best online psychedelic station on the planet . . . To Joe C. and Ric A. for the hope their proximity gives me, & the vital Art they continue to make . . . To Jim B. for pickin’ up his guitar to play, *just like yesterday* . . . To Creatures near & far, known & unknown, for ridding the world, as they can, of many laughless miles . . . & finally to beloved KD for all the rest that keeps my pen moving & heart beating brightly . . .

* * * * *



Joe Ciccone



One Prayer

In a dream of aunts and uncles
the arrangements were made;
first they took one, and then another.

Cigar smoke mushroomed from the stack
of a toy train, while I sat among stacks of carpets,
trying to say something intelligent about a song.

In the basement hung a gas mask, dangling for years
from a warped pool cue, and stuffed into a pair
of my father's old metal cleats was the same bag of hairpins,
exactly the way they were left.

In a room of blankets their beds fell away.
Through the curtainless window
they moved God-ward like a slash-mark
carving up a painting.

I set my life alongside the others,
like chattering teeth in a joke shop window,
or a row of heads nodding along a wooden booth.

They lived in days when people wore gold
and smoked indoors, boiled radiators for gas money,
and shot through the Pine Barrens
with flames bursting from their lakepipes.

Tonight my child tosses handfuls of chive
into the fire.
To her being an artist is an excuse for everything,
all heart and thumbs, rooted deeply in something.

All prayers start with one great, last line,
but end up as apologies to the dead,
who have their own problems.

* * *

All I Can Say (a series)

Prologue

I write because the past keeps happening.
Day after day I open and close,
 settle old scores.
I forget old lines and remember new ones.
 The memory of a poet
 is persistent.

* * *

i.

Before this house some trees.
Before the trees just ground.
Before the ground a house.
 You better have religion.

* * *

ii.

In my cellar there's a church.
Beside the church are several door frames.
Beside the frames are the doors,
 leaning stacked against the wall.
Light shines from beneath the doors
 but not through the frames,
 at night.

* * *

iii.

I dream of my father.

He looks at me.

 We are the same age.

He tries to speak but can't.

I try to speak but cry.

 It goes on like this for a while.

I am trying not to wake up.

 Then he motions with his index finger
as if to say

 someday, Joe,

 someday.

* * *

iv.

My surprising course
was been built of will,
unlikely as these hands,
built for working wrenches,
not the guitar—
for working steel,
not flesh.

* * *

4

v.

I can hear Telstar playing in a dusky field.
I ask the sky, "Is this perfect order or perfect chaos?"
Sighs the setting sun, "Ask my brother the moon
on his moonlit run."

* * *

vi.

You, reader, are what exists between
these words, some chosen, some there before us.
I've moved mountains before, spoon by spoon.
Words—not so much.

* * * * *

Jim Burke III

Editor's Note: The following is the thirtieth in an ongoing series derived from the correspondence between Jim Burke III and myself, begun in 1992, and in the spirit of the more enthused letter-writing tradition of yesteryear.

On the Death Penalty

"The common themes that run through these cases—from global problems like poverty and racial issues, to criminal justice issues like eyewitness misidentification, overzealous police, prosecutors, and inept defense counsel—cannot be ignored . . ."—Innocenceproject.org

March 17, 2011
Hartford, Connecticut

Dear Ray,

The death penalty has been on the books in this country since 1976, when the Supreme Court restored to the individual states the right to pose the ultimate punishment on its citizens. The pros and cons of this subject have been debated since it was restored. People that favor execution point out that it is a deterrent, society has a right for justice, and occasionally quote the Bible (i.e. "an eye for an eye"). Opponents, such as myself, refute these arguments rather easily. I will here counter proponents of the death penalty from a sociological perspective, including changes that have irrefutably and out of necessity occurred during the last half-century.¹

The first official-legal execution in this country was carried out and recorded in 1622. In England at that time, and throughout most of the seventeenth-century, the death penalty was reserved for 14 specific offenses—the American colonies half that number. The disparity in the application of this punishment was evident from the outset. In 1682, Pennsylvania had the death penalty for only two offenses (murder and treason); other states followed suit while others refused, initially, to have it incorporated into their charters. I suppose, in retrospect, that our ancestors were driven, in truth, by more of the revenge motive, without giving the implications of this act any thought. However, I am also sure from reports of crime during that period (from colonial archives) that everyone was much more dependent on each other to contribute in a meaningful way to the maintenance of life in colony towns and villages. Their solution to prevent the recurrence of relatively minor crimes was to humiliate the individual publicly (tying them to the stake or compelling short stays in the "gaol").

The most noteworthy executions during this period were the Salem witch trials. The "trials" were actually nothing of the sort, with dozens of people found guilty through evidence produced by mass hysteria. It was much like a person being thrown into a river with a heavy

1 - Much of the information presented here comes from The Innocence Project (<http://www.innocenceproject.org>) and, in turn, the U.S. Department of Justice.

stone tied to his neck. Ancient cultures considered the person innocent if he sank! Fortunately, burning at the stake was discontinued when men of authority and political influence realized that convicting people through non-physical evidence—that is to say, testimony induced through mass hysteria—was not reflective of the society that they were trying to establish. Our ancestors had left that type of society behind, in England.

The death penalty continued to be used during the next two hundred years in this country, with very few people advocating its abolishment. It was not a popular position to take. Capital punishment, as we now call it, was reserved for murder, rape, armed robbery, and horse thievery. Quite often as well, the citizens of a town would band together to form a lynch mob in the guise of a deputized posse. The usual form of execution was hanging (also sometimes a bullet to the head, to ensure the victim was dead). Of course we will never know how many innocent victims were hung.

Technology increased to the point where electricity was used daily and occasionally a worker was killed instantly from coming into contact with a live wire. People were becoming more aware of distant places, communication was expanding exponentially, and the general population was becoming more educated. Politicians were looking for a way to execute people without the mess; they had already made hangings an indoor event, and shootings were still used (although rarely). Finally, scientists hired by the government concluded that electrocution was a more humane form of execution because of the quickness with which the brain was turned to mush—less than a second, they calculated. The first execution by this method occurred in New York in 1890.² For much of the next century, the issue would be debated pro and con.

The Supreme Court abolished the death penalty in the United States in 1972 for a number of reasons, including that sentencing guidelines were written in a discriminatory manner, it was cruel and unusual punishment, and it violated the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments.³ The justices voted 5-4 for abolishment, and the court's majority opinion contained an insight still used today by myself and other death penalty opponents. The judges realized that subjectivity can *never* be removed completely from the deliberations from a jury and/or the judge deciding the sentence of an individual found guilty.

The prohibition of capital punishment ended in 1976 when the same Court reinstated the death penalty. Only hanging (rare), firing squad, gas chamber, and electrocution were permitted. However, a lot of the electric chairs were running into prohibitive costs to maintain, and the gas chamber was considered too grisly, since on many occasions the condemned was able to survive for a brief period of time. Again, a new solution was needed and, in 1982, the first person in this country, Charles Brook, Jr., was put to death by lethal injection (in Texas, of course). Lethal injection is now the common practice by 34 states, and is considered both the most humane and cost-effective method. Several executions have been botched, some very badly, because medical ethics prohibit doctors, nurses, and professional health practitioners from taking any part in this procedure. (Also, at present, the fatal cocktail is getting hard to find.)

Alongside this new means of cheap executions, modern technology has developed the means to prevent some innocent people from being executed for crimes that they did not

2 - The Governor of Kansas, Lyman U. Humphrey, and others in that state, were so appalled by the barbarism of this form of execution that it was vowed that Kansas would never use the electric chair. They would continue to use the trusted method of hanging the condemned.

3 - The Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. In a 1958 ruling (*Trop v. Dulles*, 356 U.S. 86), the court stated that cruel and unusual punishment "must draw its meaning from the evolving standards of decency that marks the progress of a maturing society." The Fourteenth Amendment addresses, in part, the right to due process.

commit. DNA evidence proves innocence as a philosophical certainty. There have been 268 post-conviction DNA exonerations, including some on death row. I believe that one can safely and soundly surmise that, before the development of DNA testing, many innocent people were put to death for crimes they did not commit. This is the biggest reason I will never support the use of the death penalty.

As I see it, the underlying theme to this problem is that violence in our culture has become routine, at least from a sociological perspective. The only cross-cultural solution seems to be the death penalty. However, this can never be applied equally. Numerous studies have indicated that defendants with the most money avoid the death penalty because they have access to a private attorney, as opposed to the indigent who have to rely on public defenders (with less than adequate resources to thoroughly defend their clients). Throughout history there have been many instances where innocent people have been executed.

Finally, the death penalty is not, I repeat *is not*, a deterrent. The very fact that murders in this country occur on a daily basis proves that use of the death penalty is based on the revenge motive, and this also depends on the time and place of the crime and the trial. The execution of citizens by the states in this country is used to cover up the failure of our society as a whole to educate people equally and give all people an opportunity to better themselves. When hopelessness and despair set in, the recidivism rate of prisoners increases correspondingly, from the upper to the middle to the lower socio-economic strata. Figures from the U.S. Department of Justice have confirmed this data as recently as 2009. The politicians in this country, as well as the Supreme Court, have become embarrassed and frustrated about their inability to stop the violence and so-called capital crimes. Their solution has been to put the convicted to death as cleanly as they think is possible, by lethal injection in most cases.

I hope I live to see the day when our culture will transcend revenge, and rise above hate. Peace and love for all humanity would enable us to realize our spiritual potential, which is God-like. John Lennon had it right after all. **IMAGINE!**



* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Seventh Series

“There’s no final answer.”
--Dr. Timothy Leary,
Radio interview, 1986.

i. “Are You Happy?”

That night we sat again watching that old movie,
 with Bing Crosby & that young starlet whose name
 we never knew, & you asked me the question—

& I sit here in the subway station with the trains
 going by both ways, as though the choice is as easy
 as the choosing, this way or that one—

& I suppose I could have looked up her name
 in the time since you’ve been gone, but I haven’t—
 I sit here, again, watching & not choosing—

You asked me the question I am still not answering
 after all this time, & I think: if I finally answer,
 I lose you, for you will smile no matter what I say,

& turn away for a moment, & think of other things.

ii. How to Train Your Dragon

The dragon in the human heart urges
 to fly again, & to blow out furious fires
 of song. Housed in a body ever passing,
 & a mind caged in motion, the way out
 presents itself by tawdry principle, bloated
 emotion, & the knife. The dragon bides, & bides.

iii. Old Man

All night I stared at him,
 lying on his deathbed, eyes shut,
 long grey beard tucked above his blanket.
 Silent, still.
 & I kept coming back, over & over,
 from wherever else, a circuit
 returning me to this slow dying,
 in this strange place, locomotives & cypress trees,
 far from where he'd ruled, where he'd created,
 where he'd loved. Seemed a warning.
 A warning. The years pass & I keep returning.
 Still dying. Still the scents of morning
 nearing. We owe the dead nearly all
 but what to those dying in our dreams?

iv. Generate Silence . . .

The famous artist & his wife, she of the many
 veils & scarves, led the golden tiger
 through the town, its crowded parks of
 pink cheeks & tossed balls. The tiger
 padded along, noiselessly, a monstrous hunger
 beneath teeth & tawn. Stopped for a word,
 a photograph, an embrace, the artist
 answered each time, "healing is hereon,"
 gestured softly to his robust tiger &
 then his pale wife, veils pushed back.

Later, perhaps, the tiger lounged among
 frail bones & remaining bits of flesh.
 To meet this hour's music, finally,
 & follow its pathless course, you must
 generate silence enough to blanket
 the past's cries & moans. You must eat
 the tiger too, in all, leave no bones, nor
 even a scent.

v. Zublian

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, "Dance at Bougival," oil on canvas, 1885.

The bugs kept getting bigger in that studio,
 a room & a window, & a toilet,
 & there were of different kinds, some
 like me, they knew my want for touch.
 They laughed. I imagined them laughing but,
 they laughed. They crawled on her skin,
 her face & arms, never his, as they
 danced in tatters on my wall. Never
 his. Hung from her bonnet, peeked up,
 peeked down, offered to tell, knew I'd
 say no. Dancing close with her, holding her
 hand, her embrace, he no more possessed
 her than I did in my half-sunk chair.
 They laughed. They knew.

vi. Distress

From the basement we protested,
 it was tight & dirty, & I kept forgetting
 against what. A bent idea called God?
 The next king? I turned to one of the
 younger bodies, warm lights still on her face.
 She used words somebody else had said,
 whispered in that dank of old blood, with
 bookish fervor. Heated more on a distant
 fire. Turned to an older one, his mind
 a familiar scar from the many meetings
 & scrambles through shouting hours that had
 brought us here. He huddled me close &
 said there was no more light up there
 worth knowing. Memories. Eyed that younger
 one with a lingering stroke. By last chance,
 I turned to my own face in the basement's
 half-remaining antique mirror. I saw nobody
 else in its reflection as I dodged my eye &
 face. It's been a rough stretch, I turned &
 explained, hoping somebody was there.
 Only the darkness & the thought of your
 name, your smile. You were near. Nearer.



vii. Take Back Your Mind

The pencils soften during transit,
I noticed this the first time
it occurred to me to kill them all
& bring you back with me to this
hopeful new hour. You would like it
here, with your curiosity & dagger's wit.

No, that dog isn't quite a dog. He's from . . .
hereon, & it didn't quite work so
he's not fully here. It upsets him
that he cannot speak. We touch his
tawny fur, caress his warmth, love him
all we can, but he cannot say his name.

Yes, the pencils. I think it means that
when we go, we also don't return quite
the same. You'll see, your console is nearly
built. No, we cannot go out there, now
or ever. This room is safe from all but
the planet's own destruction. But we can't leave.

We can love each other, & the world, forever,
in the past, the future, but never now.

viii. We Only Live A Day

He had loved the law when a strong, young
man, how it flowed & changed through time,
how it emerged from men's hearts & fears
but also from the world around them,
if the land was hard or fertile, if the snows
came for six months of the year.

Supple & sublime, he called it, a powerful beast
in every crack & shadow, it spoke to him
of changing eternal, he dreamed it in his
bachelor's chambers, until on a street past
sundown he met a woman in a pink dress &
red bonnet. More supple, more sublime. His pages cracked.

On his usual street corner now, he fingers
the payphone for change, hikes the rope
of his oily trousers, mumbles to his blue doll
of the conspiracy between pink cheeks &
the ships overhead. I lean closer to listen
from an empty store doorway. I do not wish to become him.

They'll find nothing left when they finally
come for me. My books are gone. My health.
I'll crack open at first touch. Lizard bones in a desert sun.

ix. Remembering the Old West

The old argument between now,
tomorrow, & eternity, I've travelled
awhile & haven't decided. Back then,
I sang them spirituals & blues to keep
things close. I told them God rode
with them on their hunts, & a bit of God
fell when one of them did. It seemed fair
to say, if not true. They liked it, kept people out.

Later, I worked with a rich man, found him
things, razors, talking pillows, he thought
I had the magick, no, I didn't, I don't,
I told him, I've travelled, the possible
& the impossible are not adjacent lands,
pointed to the sunset, try to keep it in your hands.

Since then I've just kept it all in my head
& looked for new work. These times
need a magick I do not have or know,
need a preacher & a prayer greener than
the ones around here. But I don't want
to leave. It's where I've been travelling to.

x. A Priest & a Rabbi Walk Into a Bar . . .

Only disbelieve in nothing, that's what
LSD taught me, in time. I said that
too, only disbelieve in nothing, & again,
only disbelieve in nothing, that night
in the TV news studio, as they dosed
my buddy & me for the cameras,
dripping it down our faces, saying
this was how it's done.

The man being interviewed, the expert
on this, he's taking donations &
signing people up. No trouble happened
because of any of this, he continues,
& I think: he sounds like he's been to the
future & knows for sure. My buddy & I
laugh, this is what happens when the experts
go on TV & start to explain.

xi. [untitled]

If I believed in god, he would look like a tree
& sing forever.

xiii. Circulation Salves Distress

I met him at a party at a dilapidation
 near the city of scholars & beggars. We were
 both long homeless then. The party was for
 travellers like us, at crossroads & tired.
 The game going on as I arrived was a favorite,
 simply called Chains, a reminder of
 what happens when you stop moving.

The dilapidation had no roof to comfort,
 or conceal, to lie that every soul tonight
 slept warm & caged. There were the heady
 local periodicals on plastic tables, dense
 erudition made to capture a melodic fancy
 & dissect a fang to its meaning. Amongst the periodicals
 were squat jars of the dreaming juice.
 You could tell its heavier drinkers by
 their whispered song, “sometimes I am me,
 sometimes I’m not, sometimes I’m arriving,
 sometimes passing through.”

He noticed to me the rhythm of the place,
 its restive hum, how nothing here abided
 agreeably in time. We huddled with others
 near the wall & laughed at the film
 about the crazy dog from the future,
 never quite arrived. It learned, in time,
 to croon its wish to land in music or despair.

When the soldiers came to stifle the
 open-air sexcries that worried the preachers
 & their nests on nearby streets, my buddy & I
 left to travel on together awhile.
 The morning was quiet, not yet sunrise,
 between breaths of wind a silence.
 We left the city of scholars & beggars
 to its thousand-year decay, to what men
 will think when none need crawl a thick tome
 for answers, nor any need wish pages made better food.

xiii. Lithe

What the others come here for isn't
important. We're told to skin for devices,
the lower drawers, safes in the walls,
keep looking, in the laundry, the trash,
they're somewhere. This hotel is bugged as a
project high-rise, told again & again.
So we look, some of us, I think most
just need the job, & keep moving room to room.

We all have reasons, that's all. I come here
day after day to find you, to sniff you
out, sometimes I think I just want your scent
one more time, sometimes I think once
I find it I'll follow it back to you. If any man
could, it would be me. It was mine first.

Wasn't it? I think so. I let that matter
to me. I skin for devices, find them,
never turn them in, or give them to the worst
of us to do. I'm sniffing for you, that's why
I come. I tasted you in one of these rooms
thirty years ago, our eyes, one, watching you
above me, me below you, entering, entering,
receiving, no difference. "Yes," you whispered
& smiled. I'll find you. I'll follow you back.

xiv. Sorry Youth

When I think of you these many years later,
you're on your belly nude on that studio futon,
your look back at me a fang, fuck me, hurt me,
fuck me! Make me feel something, good or not.

So now I can answer you: panty up that pretty ass,
or let me for you. I loved you enough to refrain.

xv. Feedback

The madcap scholar laughed & leaned forward
 on the couch. “The best mystics say
 we *earn* free will, like some of us
 learn to sing.” My friends laugh, &
 take pictures, it’s a good night. The house
 is run through with candles & pipes.

He follows me, for some reason,
 down into a basement room. Several
 of us are nude & making a film
 for one of the girls, her dead brother,
 it’s a sad film. “Here’s love,” says
 the scholar quietly. “For your path hereon.”

Like the best parties, with great scholars
 & all, there’s a bomb. Two of us are
 crouched over it in the tent, diffusing
 it. The scholar looks at me, the best
 of him in passing, says, “What for?
 You tell me now.” I nod toward the girls
 dancing with each other inside the house,
 up to the stars ever trying to get us
 to listen to the answers being offered,
 down to the pieces of diffused bomb
 at my feet, & shrug. And nod again.



To be continued in Cenacle | 78 | June 2011

* * * * *



Explaining the Surreal World of Living:

Poet Judih Haggai

Interviewed by Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Judih Haggai was born in Goshen, New York, and is currently living in Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Among her published work is the poetry collection Spirit World Restless, published by Scriptor Press in 2004 (and available for free download at <http://www.scriptorpress.com>). Her current work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Raymond: What was your path to living in Israel?

Judih: Originally, I am from Goshen, New York, and I moved to Canada when I was three. When I was twenty-four, in the late '70s, I came to Israel for a month's vacation from a cold winter in Toronto. I went to a kibbutz, and immediately smelled orange blossoms, and I fell in love with the smell. The more I saw the country, the more I loved it, and I just decided to stay. I never went back home. I was happy in Canada, but I hadn't found *it* until I came to Israel. I felt home. The smells, the earth, the weather, it was just beautiful.

R: What are you aware of in your changing consciousness that shows up in your poems?

J: As a girl, I was extremely honest—forthright and confident. I wrote and directed plays at the age of 9, I performed for audiences as a puppeteer and speaker. I was simply me.

As a young woman, I fell under influences of others—I believed that others had the answers or at least the keys to different directions and that my job was to follow their example—expanding my skills as a dancer, performer, cook, speaker, bookbinder. Self-expression became a mission, a meditation towards finding my identity.

As I started to have children, I moved away from the luxury of possessing my time. I was no longer free to make puppets or write plays—I was limited to grabbed time—sometimes only for five minutes. My writing really took off, however, when I received my first computer and could save chunks of work for later editing. It offered me efficiency and I was able to write with a baby on my lap. Writing for me became a necessary world—as children grabbed my nights and my nipples. Writing expanded the seconds into explorations. I wrote down stories of my experiences with the Jazz band, the Jazz Union. I examined imaginary characters that I lumped together from those I'd met in Israel.

After a while, writing became my necessary world. I lived through my first war in Israel and turned to writing for therapy, and to explain the surreal world of living in closed quarters, dinnertimes interrupted by war sirens, bombs crashing outside my window. Writing became a lifeline to sanity.

It's stayed that way. I write daily—to purge dreams, to gauge my emotions, to express the inner longing I have for simplicity. My children also write and sing and play. Their father is a musician and together there's a lot of creativity around.

R: You live in Israel, known for its religious significance. How does this play through your writing?

J: Walking the land here is unlike any other place. There's biblical history in every grain of sand. When I'm in northern New York State, for example (I drive through there occasionally), I feel the Native American element in the forests and soil. Here, it's all very sandal and robes. As I bike through the fields to my kibbutz, I know that thousands of people have walked this land—history is unavoidable.

I don't think of Israel as a religious country, because I'm surrounded by kibbutzniks. My kibbutz is secular, but the quiet of Saturdays, when the country rests, is quite wonderful. Even when people drive to go visit family and friends, the day of rest creates a brilliant quiet oasis in the week. It balances the mind, allows one to replenish the spirit.

How is Israel different? It's very political. Arab-Israeli theatres exist. Youth theatres in cities under attack exist. A brilliant Israeli Arab, Juliano Mer-Khamis, a well-known actor and theater director born of Jewish and Arab parents, died on Monday when a gunman opened fire on his car as he was driving home with his infant son. He started a theater in Jenin, a refugee camp, and was murdered for political reasons.

The National Theatre is always broke. Fringe theatre festivals flourish but again with little money.

R: Who are your poetic models, famed and otherwise? Was there a first hero who inspired you to try your hand at poetry?

J: Poets I love are Diane diPrima, Allen Ginsberg (he always inspires me), Martina Newberry, Basho and Issa (the famous haiku poets), Kerouac.

A first hero? I first wrote poetry at around the age of 14, and I think that I was influenced by Paul Simon (for his vocabulary), Bob Dylan for his intensity, Walt Whitman for his lush passion, and Virginia Woolf for her lyrical rhythm.

My first poems were more protest poems—thinly veiled cynical pieces designed to mock the shallow high school students who formed my peer group. I was quite amazed that they felt that life's suffering could be obliterated with beer. Life to me was so beautiful—it was only the people who made things so difficult.

R: How do other art forms show up in your writing?

J: I think in color, sound and image. I often visualize huge complex paintings and then try to write down the forms. I also like to draw freestyle and then have words come from that. But lately, I write in absolute momentary focus. I listen to the sounds around me and create a word union between place and mind.

R: Is there a poetic form you wish to master?

J: I like playing with form – just today, Martina Newberry posted a ghazal at an online forum I frequent, Arcanum Café (<http://www.arcanumcafe.com>), and it was refreshing to wander through a set format. But truly, I prefer any short form of poetry. I'm working very hard on trying to master haiku. I feel the light hand of a master poet makes the form of haiku one of the most challenging.

* * * * *

Judih Haggai



clowns ahoy
puppets and surprise
boundaries dissolve

* * *

tel aviv women
ballet flats
street smart

* * *

neighbourhood sleeps
one small light
over kitchen stove

* * *

dreams reveal
ancient connections
symbols speak

* * *

a vessel
slippery with compassion
life slides through

* * *

out of the lotus
soft pearl thoughts
hatch and arise

* * *

bottom blues line
young bird takes solo
approach of Spring

* * *

on top of dreams
crack of daylight
peacock alert

* * *

steely toed acrobat
balance of mind and gut
maneuvers the tao

* * *

daylight prods dream
another chance to dance
with the hummingbird

* * *

birds this early morning
sing saturday song
uninterrupted

* * *

arise thoughts
take chances
why not?

* * * * *





Ric Amante

Hooray for Stereo Mike!

What is this strange realm we inhabit?
 Fables within fables pirouette in a teardrop or groin,
 and the folks you encounter each exact their own bright pain.

After freeing the prisoners at Dachau
 they called him a liberator,
 but he'll never be able to liberate
 the image of that man chewing
 on an empty tomato can.

If the universe grants us such,
 if the words and deeds we've launched thus far
 are but a long preamble,
 if the moonlight continues to baffle the darkness—
 we may have another day,
 another thirty years of adoration left.

He's showing her his band-saw
 out in his hand-built shed
 where they're fashioning a bird's nest
 of wood shavings and condoms.

It kicks in again—
 the darling impermanence
 and startling beauty
 of old friends and snowflakes.

He takes a metaphysical hit
 each time he lights out his back door.
 Out here the earth and sky,
 its imprint as real as love or war—
 it's all movie, lesson, dream.

* * *

The Funeral Thief

They've erased my name from the dryboard
straddling the cracks in the sidewalk
before Zeno's Funeral Parlor.
My three day gig playing bouzouki
is up; anyone who was going to drop by did.
With tears and laughter the hearts of the mourners
were emptied, scoured, fortified.
I sang to them of death
as a large, old constellation of which
we know very little about.
I sang to them of death
as the dying into love and care of our aging bodies
while we spin on the roof of the planet.
I sang to them of death
as my fingers cut grids of tenderness
from gleaming metal strings.
I reached out to the departed scout
who was sharing the billing with me,
dedicating the gift and light of music
to the path he now travels upon.
And I thanked my brothers and sisters again and again
for the grace of our days, strength of our nights.
I drank deep of their clear and haggard eyes,
feeling the universe slowly widen.

* * *

Sign Language

The banshee wail of a metal saw rips along a crumpled red fender in bay 8 at “Today’s Collision.” It’s today’s collision of particles—sometimes smooth, like service, this metal on metal—rougher. A façade of 7 spry white doors followed by a box of sonic mayhem—ending in a corner wall of plate-glass office showcasing tall plants, blonde wood, soft lighting. Against plastered walls of burnt sienna hang framed color photos of gleaming cars. On glass-topped waiting room tables leer glossy flotillas of celebrity magazines. And Ms. Nordquist, the receptionist, knows about make-up and attitude. It’s all central casting and faux elegance here, while behind cushioned walls an earplugged Vinny or Sal throws down blue and orange sparks. The contrast between the staged and antiseptic serenity of the reception area versus the elemental maelstrom of the workpit is stark and vast, but the greater paradox occurs at three in the morning when the streets are empty and silent and the stars overhead are their own benediction and the equanimity of the lone and drowsy passersby is shattered by the blood-red electric doom of three foot high letters jolting and jostling night-time reverie with the unwanted, forceful, and ominous message—“Today’s Collision.”

* * *

Roll Your Own

Is there a better way to exalt the moment?—
 so muse numberless mystics
 through centuries of praise and pain,
 each fresher and vaster than the last.
 And one shall do so with the early fire of sunrise,
 traipsing in hushed and pliant light
 among sundial shadow of pine.
 And another shall do so by sitting,
 reciting a syllable while becoming a stone,
 echoing the gift of eternity.
 And a third will break open her heart,
 launching ions of compassion and love
 that rend the dark ecstatic.

But now, back in the thick of it,
 whose method crowns the horror?
 Who strings stars and skulls
 from the same wispy filament
 as best and worst reconvene?
 Truth is, there is no answer—
 questions masquerade as flower and bone.
 The angle of being
 is a medley of minds—
 work with one that doesn't flinch.

* * *

Hello?

Hello, is this Spring?

Speaking.

Where the hell ya been?

Where the hell ya think—the Southern Hemisphere.

Well, yeah, of course, but why do you abandon us every year and allow all this snow, cold, darkness, lethargy, depression, fatigue, weight-gain—shall I go on?

Hey, relax, would ya... You think I have any choice in the matter?

No, I guess not, but still I'm feeling you're kinda cavalier about the whole thing?

What do you mean?

I mean couldn't you hang out down there in Peru or Australia or wherever you're partying for just a month or so, let us have the white Christmas, the Currier and Ives landscapes, a few snow days for the kids, then come on back with the flowers and birds and sunny green stuff?

Oh, sure, stick it to the Peruvians and Australians and "whoever I'm partying with" . . . Let everyone and everything south of the equator get out of whack just so you mealy-mouthed northerners are more comfortable . . . Like I said, it's outta my control, and furthermore, you're being pretty damn self-centered, don't you think?

Yeah, I guess you're right, and you're just workin' for the Man too, I suppose, but couldn't you at least sit down and have a drink or two with Winter and tell him to knock off the snow come March?

Listen, buddy, first of all I don't drink, don't need to when I've got all these colors and songs in my bag, and secondly, Winter and I haven't spoken in years, decades, eons . . . He's a terrible conversationalist—taciturn, icy, harsh—and when I do choose to socialize it's usually with Summer at her place out on the island.

So that it's, then . . . Even though the sun has crossed the equator and it's officially Spring, the days are still going to be frigid, the hats and gloves necessary, and more damn snow tonight?

You got it, dude . . . But buck up, hang in there, you know I've always made good on my arrival . . . Meanwhile be patient and grateful for the weather you have . . . Spring on Saturn? . . . 200 degrees below zero with 500 mph winds—I don't think so . . .

Okay, okay, I get your point . . . Thanks for your take on things and letting me vent for a while. No worries . . . And may I offer a suggestion that could make things easier for you?

Sure, please do.

Why not get out of your "four seasons" rut and insert a new one between Winter and me? Some middle ground between darkness and light, cold and warmth, end and beginning . . .

Seems like it would

give you a boost psychologically and take the heat off me when I don't live up to your expectations . . .

Hmm—not a bad idea . . . I'll give it some thought.

Anyway, I gotta move along now . . . I've got a lotta work to do and not much time to do it in.

Yeah, I'll believe it when I see it . . . Oh, sorry . . .

Schmuck . . . You'll be on your knees when I bring back the lilacs . . . Get back to me with that new season idea, okay?

Okay.

Later.

Later.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & hereon to appear under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

No Dream is Ever Just A Dream

i.

*“They say that dreams are only real as long as they last.
Couldn’t you say the same thing about life?”
Waking Life (film), 2001.*

In the past several years, I have become increasingly interested in the nature, functions, & possible uses of dreaming. I believe this is in part due to their nightly occurrence over the course of my life, & everyone else’s lives (including birds, mammals, & perhaps other life-forms). My own dreams fascinate me to the point where they permeate my Art in both poetry & fiction. The same fascination is true of others’ dreams, how they have always inspired great artists, including modern ones like Salvador Dalí & Max Ernst; film-makers like Richard Linklater & Christopher Nolan; writers like Mark Z. Danielewski & Kazuo Ishiguro; & musicians like Bob Dylan & the group Shpongole. Additionally, I don’t think it’s much of a leap at all to see the many similarities between the powerfully intimate & enigmatic ways of dreams & those of psychedelics such as LSD, mescaline, & psilocybin (to name just a few of many).

Like during psychedelic trips, my dreams work differently from my conscious (or baseline) mind—discontinuous in narrative, time, place—rooting through my knowledge, memories, wishes, fears—& materials I do not readily assign a personal source (what psychiatrist Carl Jung called the impersonal, or collective, unconscious). I believe exploring these further places of the mind is of priceless value for anyone who yearns to grapple with the most basic questions of human life: “why?” & “what for?”

* * * * *



ii.

*Our dreams feel real while we're in them.
It's only when we wake up we realize things were strange . . .
Let me ask you a question: You never remember the beginning of your dreams, do you?
You just turn up in the middle of what's going on.
—Inception (film), 2010.*

These “why?” & “what for?” questions are answered no more easily for dreams than similar ones about waking. *Wikipedia's* entry for “Dream” lists (among others) the following theories: Activation Synthesis, Evolutionary Psychology, Psychosomatic, Strengthening Semantic Memories, Removing Junk, Compensation, Mood Regulation, & Expectation Fulfillment. Additional ideas would include Prognostication & Projection.

I don't know the “why?” of waking or sleeping—don't know how to find out for sure either, save to make the leap some do from facts & experience toward faith in some conclusion.

But the “what for?” offers, I believe, a chance to work with these mysteries. My waking's passion is Art, the making of it, experiencing it, & supporting it. So I've been developing collaborative techniques to produce writing made in part from dreams—along with still potent lines from past poems—mixed with current ideas:

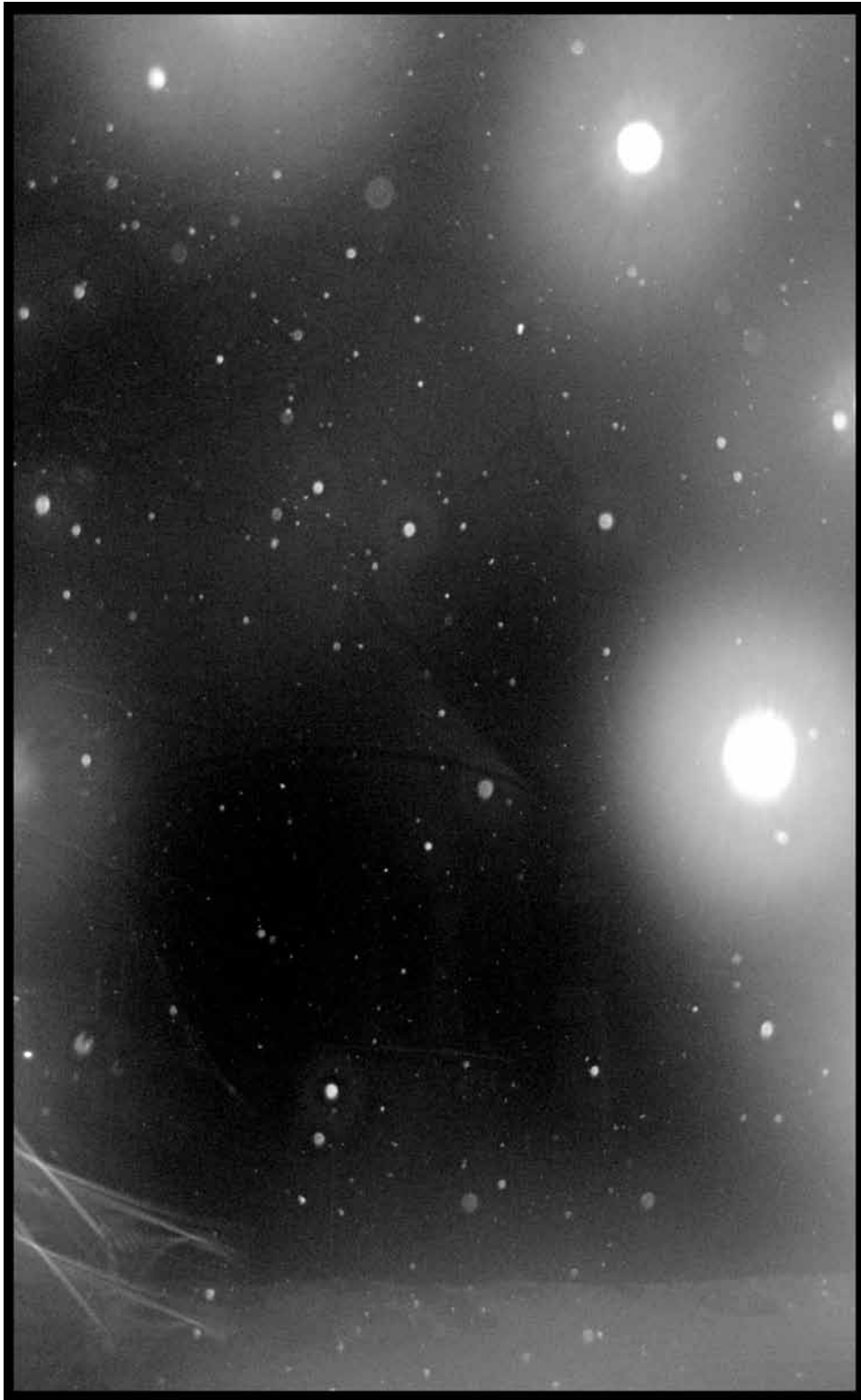
Dream Journal Entry: 03 January 2011

I was in a sit-in in a basement with a lot of others, I was dirty, & not sure how protesting from basement helped, or who protested against

Poem: Distress

From the basement we protested,
it was tight & dirty, & I kept forgetting
against what. A bent idea called God?
The next king? I turned to one of the
younger bodies, warm lights still on her face.
She used words somebody else had said,
whispered in that dank of old blood, with
bookish fervor. Heated more on a distant
fire. Turned to an older one, his mind
a familiar scar from the many meetings
& scrambles through shouting hours that had
brought us here. He huddled me close &
said there was no more light up there
worth knowing. Memories. Eyed that younger
one with a lingering stroke. By last chance,
I turned to my own face in the basement's
half-remaining antique mirror. I saw nobody
else in its reflection as I dodged my eye &
face. It's been a rough stretch, I turned &
explained, hoping somebody was there.
Only the darkness & the thought of your
name, your smile. You were near. Nearer.

What have often come, like this example, are narratives, a conscious mind's efforts to order & tell. It works, sometimes well, but I feel a taming going on—*dreams are mind unleashed from daylight's bars*—my struggle is: how to engage them without capturing pieces to place like exotic beasts in cages of song.



iii.

“We carry around in our minds our own Library of Congress. Vast volumes, endless collections of every experience our senses have ever been exposed to since our conception, are recorded in some unknown way in our own brains. The more we experience of life, of interesting and beautiful things, the more we have fascinating texts to take down from a shelf in our dream wanderings. It is all there, available to us, waiting to be read, browsed through, carefully examined, and recombined into our very own creative products and solutions.”

—Dr. Patricia Garfield, *Creative Dreaming*, 1974.

Think of it like swimming in the ocean, surrounded all by sea & sky—& then describing it later. It’s not that words cannot rise tall to the effort & illustrate *something* vividly & perhaps beautifully, but neither writer nor any reader is *in* the ocean, or is at best proximate by another leap, that of empathetic imagination. Thus, I believe, is the same with dreams (& by easy extension, psychedelic trips). One is dreaming or one isn’t. One is writing or reading about dreams or *one is dreaming*.

The notes & remembrances retrieved from dreaming are like the shells, the sand, the sunburns, the starfish brought home. My ragged sheaf of dream journal notes goes back nearly a couple years now (there are tales of persons keeping dream journals for decades). Mostly shells, sand, sunburns. A few starfish, not a thrilling lot.

What I most wish to do is to create a feedback between waking & sleeping, & work it up to songs. New poems. Written waking, yet run through by the ocean in my blood, what flows me every hour.

Dream Journal Entry: 18 February 2011

I am on CNN, an audience member of a interview with an LSD expert, sitting next to PK [a friend], the man interviewed has a beaker long & bony he doses PK, then me, in my eye, on my face, my skin, says no trouble from anyone for appearing, many donations talking as though present is the past & its consequences known

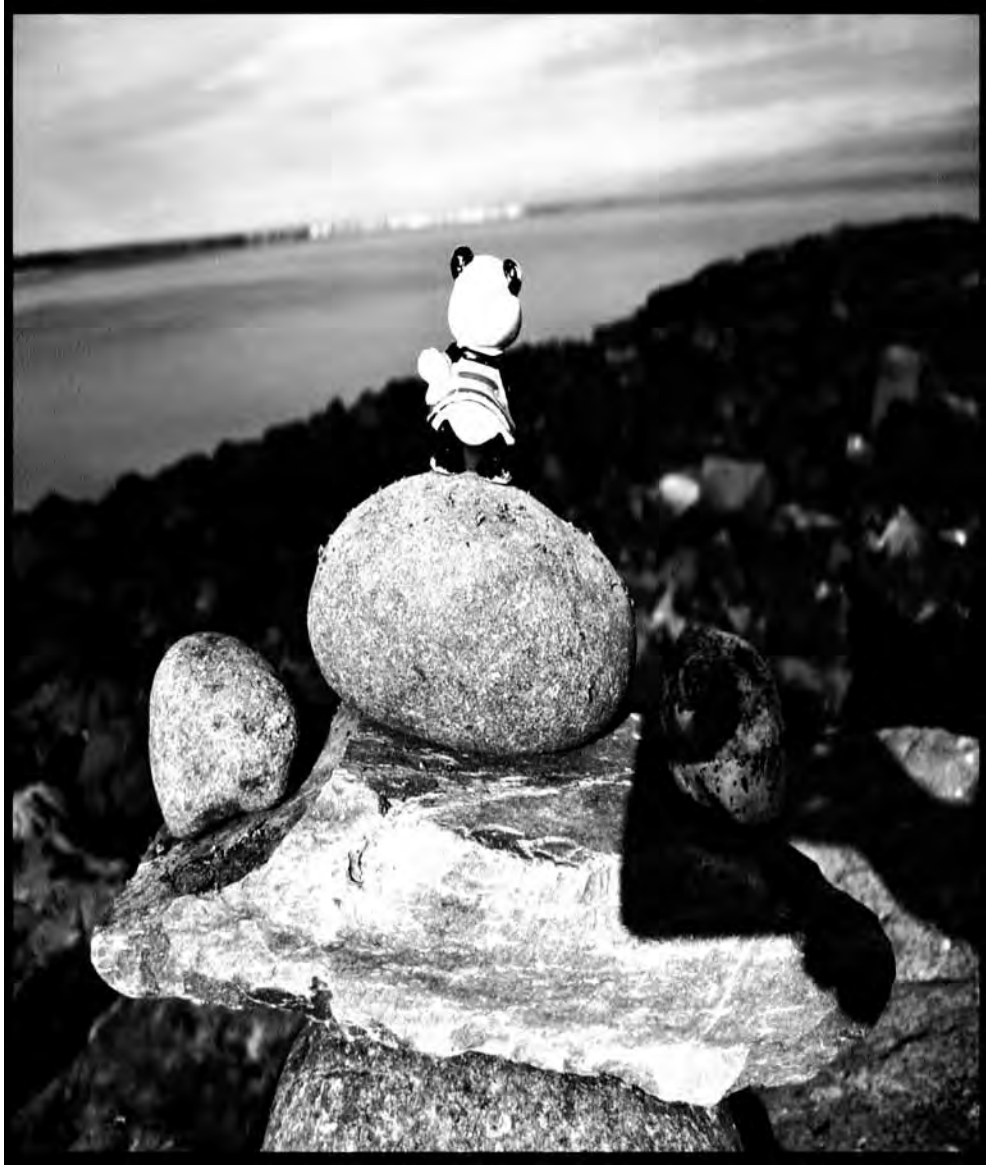
Poem: A Priest & a Rabbi Walk Into a Bar . . .

Only disbelieve in nothing, that’s what LSD taught me, in time. I said that too, only disbelieve in nothing, & again, only disbelieve in nothing, that night in the TV news studio, as they dosed my buddy & me for the cameras, dripping it down our faces, saying this was how it’s done.

The man being interviewed, the expert on this, he’s taking donations & signing people up. No trouble happened because of any of this, he continues, & I think: he sounds like he’s been to the future & knows for sure. My buddy & I laugh, this is what happens when the experts go on TV & start to explain.

I have reason to believe that what I am striving for is possible because years ago I was told one could not eat LSD & write meaningfully during one’s trip. Took a year of trying during many trips but I found a way to do it, what writer Ken Kesey referred to as *steering one’s trip*. It has to do with sharpening one’s focus, a slowing down, a gazing simultaneously in & out, listening, sniffing, & eventually the words come, like the language of baseline consciousness but fired more . . . widely & deeply.

The equivalent might be called lucid dreaming but I’ve not pushed toward conscious



control of my dreaming. Oddly, right or wrong, that feels to me like chasing the exotic beast with a saddle. I seem more to want to open the border between waking & sleeping, not invade the latter & occupy it. Open border, feedback; news of this, sometimes in songs.

What the Dreamland of my mind thinks of this, I don't know. The offer is made from the waking side. I ask this because I have at least once brought a poem fairly whole from a dream. Woke, hurriedly wrote it down:

Dream Journal Entry: 01 January 2011

Poem: "Are You Happy?"

That night we sat again watching that old movie,
with Bing Crosby & that young starlet whose name
we never knew, & you asked me the question—

& I sit here in the subway station with the trains
going by both ways, as though the choice is as easy
as the choosing, this way or that one—

& I suppose I could have looked up her name
in the time since you've been gone, but I haven't—
I sit here, again, watching & not choosing—

You asked me the question I am still not answering
after all this time, & I think: if I finally answer,
I lose you, for you will smile no matter what I say,

& turn away for a moment, & think of other things.

Maybe dreaming is simply like floating in the ocean forever: one never has to get out & go to work a job, or search fruitlessly for one, or sit in front of a frowning doctor, or worry about people & animals & lands perishing in stupid nuclear reactor disasters, or preventable floods, or wars. There are storms, calm dawns, & stretches lonely & those with others near—but nobody & nothing is unimportant, considered disposable. Nothing lasts but nothing is lost.

iv.

"I dream of dark and troubling things."

—David Lynch (film director), 2010.

Here's what I dream about: old loves, two in particular—one from decades ago, whom I never kissed; the other from years ago for whom I traveled cross-continent & nearly gave up all I was for. The former in dreams eludes me still but doesn't quite ever leave; the latter I encounter in dreams with perpetually unresolved pain & disappointment. These are dream scars, wounds deep in my psyche manifest as old & lost intimates. One is what I cannot attain; the other, what I've unfairly lost. Remembered persons & generated symbols, both.



Dream Journal Entry: 09 March 2011

A hotel, full of covert activity, at one pt I am in someone's room, on cell, told to "skin" drawers, which means look for devices, I have no luck but my boss does, not a bug but something—

Poem: Lithe

What the others come here for isn't important. We're told to skin for devices, the lower drawers, safes in the walls, keep looking, in the laundry, the trash, they're somewhere. This hotel is bugged as a project high-rise, told again & again. So we look, some of us, I think most just need the job, & keep moving room to room.

We all have reasons, that's all. I come here day after day to find you, to sniff you out, sometimes I think I just want your scent one more time, sometimes I think once I find it I'll follow it back to you. If any man could, it would be me. It was mine first.

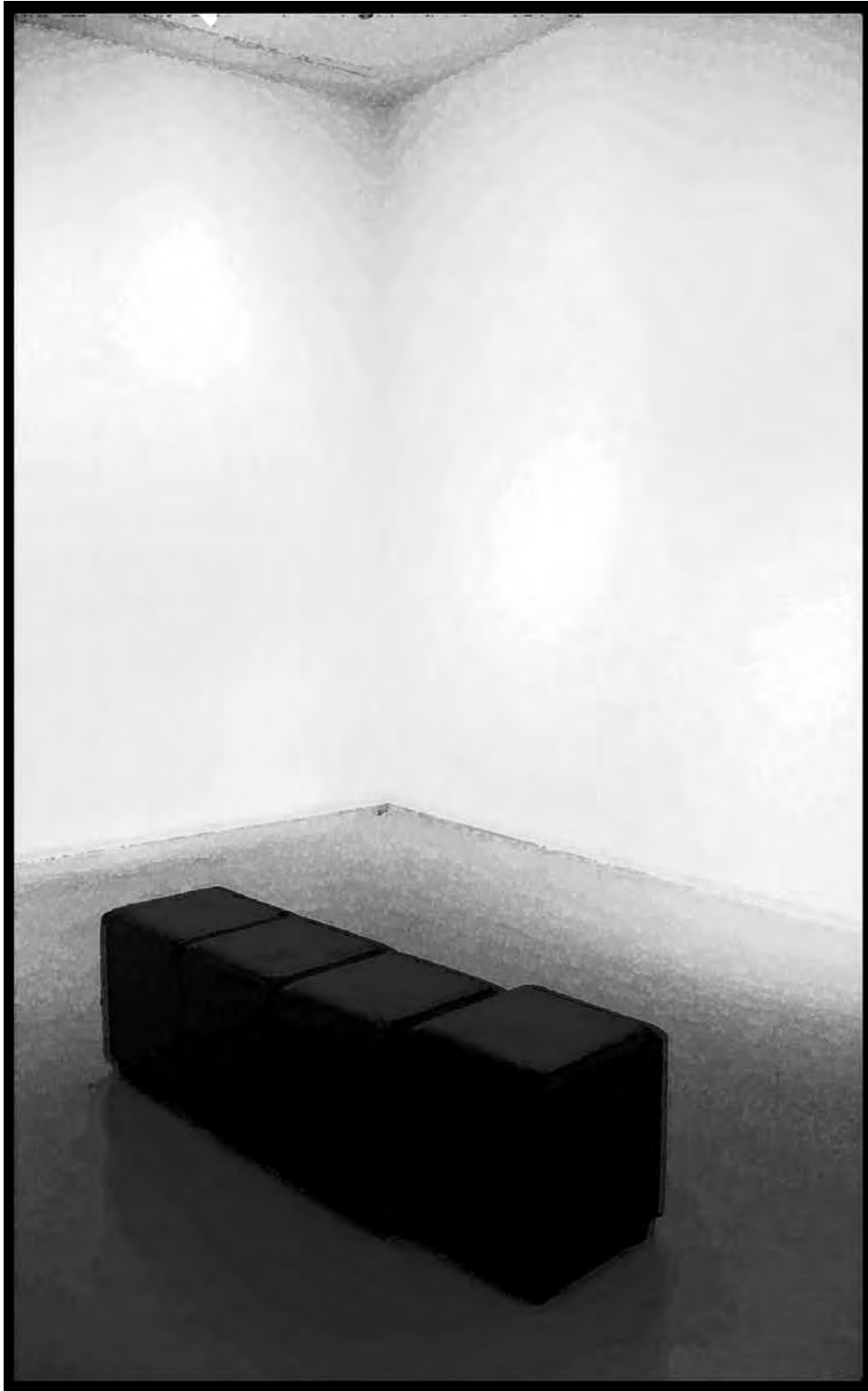
Wasn't it? I think so. I let that matter to me. I skin for devices, find them, never turn them in, or give them to the worst of us to do. I'm sniffing for you, that's why I come. I tasted you in one of these rooms thirty years ago, our eyes, one, watching you above me, me below you, entering, entering, receiving, no difference. "Yes," you whispered & smiled. I'll find you. I'll follow you back.

I dream of old jobs, sometimes in offices, most often bookstore jobs. Selling books was a profession I held for many years; it was dear to me. I felt my various bookstore colleagues were like family; we shared the hard grunt of retail work in order to purvey objects we greatly valued. We were paid poorly. It wasn't easy work, yet it had a sense of mission about it. I have not felt nearly as close toward the various large corporations I've worked for since. I provide knowledge of tools, a set of skills; they pay me for as long as I prove useful. No love, no mutual sacrifice, no shared mission. Just a nice fucking check when I'm doing it, & the whorish feeling of chasing the next one.

Dream Journal Entry: 10 February 2011

I am working for a law firm, new job, early on asked about it I liken it as a show to *L.A. Law*, which the lawyer had not heard of—my job is ambiguous—I am uncertain & tenuous—one of the lawyers has 3 only somewhat friendly cats; they tend to leave at 2—I experience 2 days there, have some kind of dubious ID—the head lawyer has a TV interview w/Sen Russ Feingold—at another point they are filming them all around a table, joshing, throwing stuff—there is a term they use, I forget—I feel imbalanced, unsure, yet nobody is unfriendly—there is an empty office, one of the lawyers has moved from it; this dream is a long one, very vivid

I've dreamed of long complex buildings, many rooms, floors, labyrinthine, baroque, & fascinating. I sometimes think these dreams are what Art is to me, how it seems endlessly possible. Sometimes I am chased or in danger in these dreams. There is one powerful recurring one in particular:



Dream Journal Entry: 08 April 2011

In a large building climbing from level to level, each one I would arrive & it would be perilous, impossibly big, the top one was a huge library & I noted to someone this explained Harvard Bookstore [Note: one of my old bookstore employers] below, similar obscure books, then I was remembering the neighbor in such a building, how I liked writing in one of her many rooms, she would let me explore, vast endless but, was that a different building I was thinking of—this all harkens to previous dreams I *did* have—like dreams recalling earlier ones

I dream of the Burning Man Arts Festival that I attended from 1999 to 2009. Of returning or at least of being near to it again. Strange: the seeming wish to be close, yet not a part of:

Dream Journal Entry: 17 January 2011

Near Burning Man, a building, pretty & strange, I wanted to go to the elaborate thing there, people came into the building KD & I were at, she got mad; I floated through a series of rooms, sometimes pulled; a movie called *Wrong Way*

Dream Journal Entry: 04 April 2011

Dream of BM, I was back, it felt nice, didn't know if I'd stay til burn, mostly on a bus really, not much at the event.

These are examples of kinds; everyone has recurring dreams. There are also singular dreams, of animals, bugs, flying, falling, sex, & so on:

Dream Journal Entry: 05 January 2011

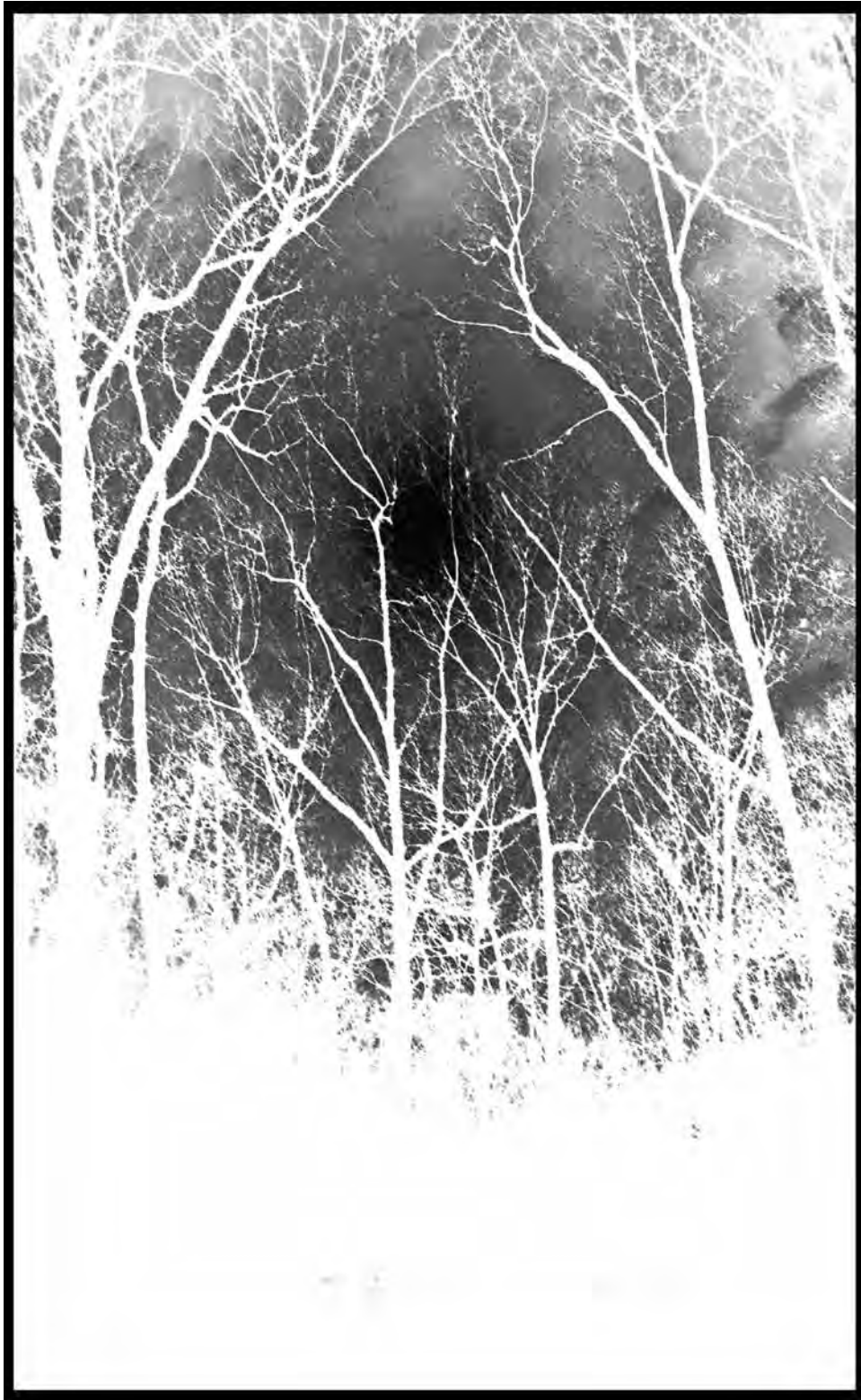
In a place where bugs kept getting bigger on wall, one was human shaped

Poem: Zublian

[Note: "Zublian" is a dream-word]

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, "Dance at Bougival," oil on canvas, 1885.

The bugs kept getting bigger in that studio,
a room & a window, & a toilet,
& there were of different kinds, some
like me, they knew my want for touch.
They laughed. I imagined them laughing but,
they laughed. They crawled on her skin,
her face & arms, never his, as they
danced in tatters on my wall. Never
his. Hung from her bonnet, peeked up,
peeked down, offered to tell, knew I'd
say no. Dancing close with her, holding her
hand, her embrace, he no more possessed
her than I did in my half-sunk chair.
They laughed. They knew.



v.

“Like dreams, psychedelics are catalysts for generating information in the human imagination.”
—James Kent, *Psychedelic Information Theory*, 2010.

To give dreams their full due is to acknowledge a *continuation* of consciousness, into dream-space (into psychedelic space too), not an *unconsciousness* at all. The mind does not cease thinking even as the body, while at rest, continues its basic functions.

The mind, in the dark, at rest from activities, falls into a kind of deprivation-tank-state. It creates a series of interior experiences, some epic, some small, some precise, some vague, some just fucking weird. Many forgotten before waking. Think of it: the many dreams lost, the time spent experiencing these dreams, their disappeared intensity or wisdom or freakishness. Gone before daylight. Irrecoverable.

Dream Journal Entry: 16 March 2011

Fragments tho I tried to keep more—something about a dragon—& a boy who only wanted to be involved in white people’s sports—I told him about hockey—didn’t like it

I believe dreams mean something, many things, like everything means something. Some cultures—like Native American tribes, & the Senoi of Malaysia—place a greater important on dreaming, dream interpretation, dream-wisdom. A materialist, fear-driven society, like the current American one, shies away from dreams, their mysteries, their seeming lack of immediate usefulness, or easy integration into its perpetual production-consumption-waste cycle. Dreams pose too many questions, offer too many answers, trade in both easy & obscure regrets, familiar & forbidden desires. Dreams breach space & time, are beyond anarchy because they have *no* accepted order against which to rebel.

I share dreaming with every set of eyes reading these words & yet I don’t as well. I’ll never directly witness your dreaming, nor you mine (at least until, if ever, some version of Christopher Nolan’s film *Inception* comes to be).

This shared/not-shared aspect returns to me over & over. One of few experiences almost every human is sure to have. Eating, breathing, evacuating, dreaming. Born, dying. Not many more. All but dreaming seem to have more relevance as to how most contemporary societies form & function. Dreams just happen, unbidden, nothing to dispose of after, or pack up. Nothing bought or sold. Easy for most to ignore—because nightly, because many, because most forgotten upon waking.

Dream Journal Entry: 18 April 2011

Night out in countryside, I am moving through roads, sometimes dark, scary, at one point a road showing city skyline, at another I am in bed, realizing I am both sleeping & out on roads—dual?

* * * * *

vi.

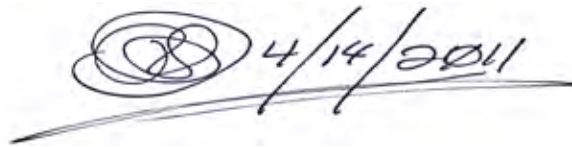
*"No dream is ever just a dream."
Eyes Wide Shut (film), 1999.*

It seems to me that most of us are not so much raised to perpetuate the best of our youth, but to reject these things in favor of assimilation, survival. There is a promise embedded in leaving behind one idea after another, chasing, ever chasing. Life spiked with restlessness, with wordless yearn, with behavioral control disguised as answers themselves.

Dreams stand oddly opposed to all of this. To cause & effect, to one linear narrative, to physics, to the uneasily manufactured consent that both quietly & brutally governs people's lives. I believe dreams are the best defense of the individual, his or her assurance that each one of us has unspent value, & the world around us is run more by guess & outright ignorance that is often admitted.

For all of this written, I still don't know what dreams are, what for, or if my ideas to collaborate with them sum to much. This is *my* leap of faith, then.

I don't remember many dreams from my youth but I do remember waking up from dreams about the TV show *Star Trek*; I'd be clutching the air where moments before I'd held a phaser gun in my hand. Or I'd be grabbing under my pillow for where I'd hid it. It was never there.

A handwritten signature consisting of a circular scribble followed by the date 4/14/2011, all written in black ink.



Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor



Winter Thaw

Again we were walking
this familiar path, leash tethered
to Zoe's ramble of pulls, pulse,
impulse (only a dog, her name
means 'life'). We knew the way
by heart—by our own hearts, heated
to this pace, keeping step
with unseasonable rhythm
and weather.

The thaw was memory, mist,
transfusion. Its cut into the cold
was deep; it wet the dry bones
of bark, softened spiny wires
of brambles, sent clumps of
unfrozen leaves lumbering
along suddenly tufted ground.

It rained barely, the slightest kiss;
the wind hardly a rumple across
hair, face, her fur—she nosed
for scent and sense
in those leaves mounded
around ridges and risen roots.

The dark was by now translucent,
but steady, the only mark of winter—
We would have been at the pond
If not for this mask of early night,
the dampening of our wandering.

It will be cold again, and memory
will recede; the world will be new
with snow and fingers of ice,
freezing our senses to the present.
The thaw will take its place as
Interval, in which some things
Appeared after long loss, and
touched us, temporarily and for
always, and put themselves away,

folding into cedar chest and drawers.
Moistness, realness, hand pressed
against ours—father, mother; tracers
of city noise, light, momentum;
friendships forged, firm or
ill-fated; the grip on our shoes
of other streets and stones, the rocks
remembering country roads—all are
wrapped away in a dry place
forever and for a time,
with a final glint and flash.

* * *

On the Example of Bay Leaves

Luckier than a four-leafed clover,
Alias Ghar, Aley Daphne,
Sweet Laurel, the Bay Leaf
Smacks of its own sweet
Dry bark. Its savor deepens
Without disturbing its determined
Exoskeleton, without distressing
Its bony delicacy.

The Bay Leaf's form
Recalls itself;
Cracked, the phantom edge retrieves,
Without necessity of hope,
Its leafy wholeness. Torn,
Its fanlike frame will not tear away;
Forcibly crumbled, its flavor keeps.

Only in dreams and night terrors
Does anything so assaulted in us
Cling so true along our bones.
War's frenzy cannot reclaim
Its sacrifices. Weeping
Does not return the taken;

Rage will not conjure,
from remains, the motion—
the grip of hands,
The turn of phrase,
The pulse of mind
that lit the eyes.

And you of vows and mirrors
Who living could not detain—
Should I awaken
You from phantom edges,
Engrams of old socks,
And that one shoe tucked
beneath the bed—

Would song, or word, or prayer
regain
Your chain of heartbeats—
Indifferent to hope,
Unselfconscious
That a random rap of fortune
Could deliver your whispered life away?

* * *

Dust

There's too much dust, you said. And a layer had increased everything.
TV screen, desk, the unopened cleaners. And you shook them, unsettled them,
Floated dust mites around the house. You were angry.

There's too much noise, you said. You were poking, prodding, muckraking, mad
At the squirrels who ate their nuts and threw them to the ground, chitting.

There's too much, too much. So you claim. We are uneven, clamorous, scrappy. There's a
world of peace that can't contain itself in this din. It breaks out.

It counters visions, purity. Its feet are propped on the table. It clatters through the house.
The dust is disturbed again, like silence.

* * *

Promise

Soft sounds—not birds but
Whispers—teapot far away—
Not hissing—hushing.

Ground like slippers. Air
Like plump fruit. No leaves yet but
A promise, rising.

* * *

The Sly Universe

Be careful of the universe that plays tricks on you—
That gives you a gift that stays too long and leaves too soon—
A slack-jawed man in a cheap suit who becomes your lover because
He likes the same brand of toothpaste you do.

Be careful, be skeptical, when it offers you a job that ends up
Paying you under the table. Be careful when it steals for you, and
You wind up with furniture that could have fallen off the back of a truck.
Be wary when your friends show up for the party, and it ends up a wake.

Beware the sly universe—it can snatch the cleats off your tap shoes in mid-air,
And the cushions off your old soft shoes when you land. Sure, be generous,
Be wise, eat healthy, exercise—but count your fingers when it shakes your hand,
And check for fever when it blesses you for sneezing.

* * * * *



Nathaniel Hawthorne



The Artist of the Beautiful

[Classic Fiction]

From Mosses from an Old Manse, 1846, 1854.

An elderly man, with his pretty daughter on his arm, was passing along the street, and emerged from the gloom of the cloudy evening into the light that fell across the pavement from the window of a small shop. It was a projecting window; and on the inside were suspended a variety of watches, pinchbeck, silver, and one or two of gold, all with their faces turned from the street, as if churlishly disinclined to inform the wayfarers what o'clock it was. Seated within the shop, sidelong to the window, with his pale face bent earnestly over some delicate piece of mechanism, on which was thrown the concentrated lustre of a shade-lamp, appeared a young man.

"What can Owen Warland be about?" muttered old Peter Hovenden, himself a retired watchmaker, and the former master of this same young man, whose occupation he was now wondering at. "What can the fellow be about? These six months past, I have never come by his shop without seeing him just as steadily at work as now. It would be a flight beyond his usual foolery to seek for the perpetual motion. And yet I know enough of my old business to be certain, that what he is now so busy with is no part of the machinery of a watch."

"Perhaps, father," said Annie, without showing much interest in the question, "Owen is inventing a new kind of time-keeper. I am sure he has ingenuity enough."

"Poh, child! he has not the sort of ingenuity to invent anything better than a Dutch toy," answered her father, who had formerly been put to much vexation by Owen Warland's irregular genius. "A plague on such ingenuity! All the effect that ever I knew of it was, to spoil the accuracy of some of the best watches in my shop. He would turn the sun out of its orbit, and derange the whole course of time, if, as I said before, his ingenuity could grasp anything bigger than a child's toy!"

"Hush, father! He hears you," whispered Annie, pressing the old man's arm. "His ears are as delicate as his feelings, and you know how easily disturbed they are. Do let us move on."

So Peter Hovenden and his daughter Annie plodded on, without further conversation, until, in a by-street of the town, they found themselves passing the open door of a blacksmith's shop. Within was seen the forge, now blazing up, and illuminating the high and dusky roof, and now confining its lustre to a narrow precinct of the coal-strewn floor, according as the breath of the bellows was puffed forth, or again inhaled into its vast leathern lungs. In the intervals of brightness, it was easy to distinguish objects in remote corners of the shop, and the horse-shoes that hung upon the wall; in the momentary gloom, the fire seemed to be glimmering amidst the vagueness of unenclosed space. Moving about in this red glare and alternate dusk, was the figure of the blacksmith, well worthy to be viewed in so picturesque an aspect of light and shade, where the bright blaze struggled with the black night, as if each would have snatched his comely strength from the other. Anon, he drew a white-hot bar of

iron from the coals, laid it on the anvil, uplifted his arm of might, and was seen enveloped in the myriads of sparks which the strokes of his hammer scattered into the surrounding gloom.

“Now, that is a pleasant sight,” said the old watchmaker. “I know what it is to work in gold, but give me the worker in iron, after all is said and done. He spends his labor upon a reality. What say you, daughter Annie?”

“Pray don’t speak so loud, father,” whispered Annie. “Robert Danforth will hear you.”

“And what if he should hear me?” said Peter Hovenden; “I say again, it is a good and a wholesome thing to depend upon main strength and reality, and to earn one’s bread with the bare and brawny arm of a blacksmith. A watchmaker gets his brain puzzled by his wheels within a wheel, or loses his health or the nicety of his eyesight, as was my case; and finds himself, at middle age, or a little after, past labor at his own trade, and fit for nothing else, yet too poor to live at his ease. So, I say once again, give me main strength for my money. And then, how it takes the nonsense out of a man! Did you ever hear of a blacksmith being such a fool as Owen Warland, yonder?”

“Well said, uncle Hovenden!” shouted Robert Danforth, from the forge, in a full, deep, merry voice, that made the roof reecho. “And what says Miss Annie to that doctrine? She, I suppose, will think it a genteeler business to tinker up a lady’s watch than to forge a horse-shoe or make a gridiron!”

Annie drew her father onward, without giving him time for reply.

But we must return to Owen Warland’s shop, and spend more meditation upon his history and character than either Peter Hovenden, or probably his daughter Annie, or Owen’s old school-fellow, Robert Danforth, would have thought due to so slight a subject. From the time that his little fingers could grasp a pen-knife, Owen had been remarkable for a delicate ingenuity, which sometimes produced pretty shapes in wood, principally figures of flowers and birds, and sometimes seemed to aim at the hidden mysteries of mechanism. But it was always for purposes of grace, and never with any mockery of the useful. He did not, like the crowd of school-boy artisans, construct little windmills on the angle of a barn, or watermills across the neighboring brook. Those who discovered such peculiarity in the boy, as to think it worth their while to observe him closely, sometimes saw reason to suppose that he was attempting to imitate the beautiful movements of Nature, as exemplified in the flight of birds or the activity of little animals. It seemed, in fact, a new development of the love of the Beautiful, such as might have made him a poet, a painter, or a sculptor, and which was as completely refined from all utilitarian coarseness, as it could have been in either of the fine arts. He looked with singular distaste at the stiff and regular processes of ordinary machinery. Being once carried to see a steam-engine, in the expectation that his intuitive comprehension of mechanical principle would be gratified, he turned pale, and grew sick, as if something monstrous and unnatural had been presented to him. This horror was partly owing to the size and terrible energy of the Iron Laborer; for the character of Owen’s mind was microscopic, and tended naturally to the minute, in accordance with his diminutive frame, and the marvellous smallness and delicate power of his fingers. Not that his sense of beauty was thereby diminished into a sense of prettiness. The beautiful Idea has no relation to size, and may be as perfectly developed in a space too minute for any but microscopic investigation, as within the ample verge that is measured by the arc of the rainbow. But, at all events, this characteristic minuteness in his objects and accomplishments made the world even more incapable than it might otherwise have been of appreciating Owen Warland’s genius. The boy’s relatives saw nothing better to be

done—as perhaps there was not—than to bind him apprentice to a watchmaker, hoping that his strange ingenuity might thus be regulated, and put to utilitarian purposes.

Peter Hovenden's opinion of his apprentice has already been expressed. He could make nothing of the lad. Owen's apprehension of the professional mysteries, it is true, was inconceivably quick. But he altogether forgot or despised the grand object of a watchmaker's business, and cared no more for the measurement of time than if it had been merged into eternity. So long, however, as he remained under his old master's care, Owen's lack of sturdiness made it possible, by strict injunctions and sharp oversight, to restrain his creative eccentricity within bounds. But when his apprenticeship was served out, and he had taken the little shop which Peter Hovenden's failing eyesight compelled him to relinquish, then did people recognize how unfit a person was Owen Warland to lead old blind Father Time along his daily course. One of his most rational projects was to connect a musical operation with the machinery of his watches, so that all the harsh dissonances of life might be rendered tuneful, and each flitting moment fall into the abyss of the Past in golden drops of harmony. If a family-clock was entrusted to him for repair—one of those tall, ancient clocks that have grown nearly allied to human nature, by measuring out the lifetime of many generations—he would take upon himself to arrange a dance or funeral procession of figures across its venerable face, representing twelve mirthful or melancholy hours. Several freaks of this kind quite destroyed the young watchmaker's credit with that steady and matter-of-fact class of people who hold the opinion that time is not to be trifled with, whether considered as the medium of advancement and prosperity in this world, or preparation for the next. His custom rapidly diminished—a misfortune, however, that was probably reckoned among his better accidents by Owen Warland, who was becoming more and more absorbed in a secret occupation, which drew all his science and manual dexterity into itself, and likewise gave full employment to the characteristic tendencies of his genius. This pursuit had already consumed many months.

After the old watchmaker and his pretty daughter had gazed at him, out of the obscurity of the street, Owen Warland was seized with a fluttering of the nerves, which made his hand tremble too violently to proceed with such delicate labor as he was now engaged upon.

“It was Annie herself!” murmured he. “I should have known it, by this throbbing of my heart, before I heard her father's voice. Ah, how it throbs! I shall scarcely be able to work again on this exquisite mechanism tonight. Annie! dearest Annie! thou shouldst give firmness to my heart and hand, and not shake them thus; for if I strive to put the very spirit of Beauty into form, and give it motion, it is for thy sake alone. O throbbing heart, be quiet! If my labor be thus thwarted, there will come vague and unsatisfied dreams which will leave me spiritless to-morrow.”

As he was endeavoring to settle himself again to his task, the shop door opened, and gave admittance to no other than the stalwart figure which Peter Hovenden had paused to admire, as seen amid the light and shadow of the blacksmith's shop. Robert Danforth had brought a little anvil of his own manufacture, and peculiarly constructed, which the young artist had recently bespoken. Owen examined the article, and pronounced it fashioned according to his wish.

“Why, yes,” said Robert Danforth, his strong voice filling the shop as with the sound of a bass viol, “I consider myself equal to anything in the way of my own trade; though I should have made but a poor figure at yours, with such a fist as this,” added he, laughing, as he laid his vast hand beside the delicate one of Owen. “But what then? I put more main strength into

one blow of my sledge hammer, than all that you have expended since you were a 'prentice. Is not that the truth?"

"Very probably," answered the low and slender voice of Owen. "Strength is an earthly monster. I make no pretensions to it. My force, whatever there may be of it, is altogether spiritual."

"Well, but, Owen, what are you about?" asked his old school-fellow, still in such a hearty volume of tone that it made the artist shrink, especially as the question related to a subject so sacred as the absorbing dream of his imagination. "Folks do say that you are trying to discover the perpetual motion."

"The perpetual motion? Nonsense!" replied Owen Warland, with a movement of disgust; for he was full of little petulances. "It never can be discovered. It is a dream that may delude men whose brains are mystified with matter, but not me. Besides, if such a discovery were possible, it would not be worth my while to make it only to have the secret turned to such purposes as are now effected by steam and water-power. I am not ambitious to be honored with the paternity of a new kind of cotton machine."

"That would be droll enough!" cried the blacksmith, breaking out into such an uproar of laughter that Owen himself and the bell-glasses on his work-board quivered in unison. "No, no, Owen! No child of yours will have iron joints and sinews. Well, I won't hinder you any more. Good night, Owen, and success, and if you need any assistance, so far as a downright blow of hammer upon anvil will answer the purpose, I'm your man!"

And with another laugh the man of main strength left the shop.

"How strange it is," whispered Owen Warland to himself, leaning his head upon his hand, "that all my musings, my purposes, my passion for the Beautiful, my consciousness of power to create it—a finer, more ethereal power, of which this earthly giant can have no conception—all, all, look so vain and idle whenever my path is crossed by Robert Danforth! He would drive me mad were I to meet him often. His hard, brute force darkens and confuses the spiritual element within me; but I, too, will be strong in my own way. I will not yield to him!"

He took from beneath a glass, a piece of minute machinery, which he set in the condensed light of his lamp, and, looking intently at it through a magnifying glass, proceeded to operate with a delicate instrument of steel. In an instant, however, he fell back in his chair and clasped his hands, with a look of horror on his face that made its small features as impressive as those of a giant would have been.

"Heaven! What have I done!" exclaimed he. "The vapor, the influence of that brute force!—it has bewildered me, and obscured my perception. I have made the very stroke—the fatal stroke—that I have dreaded from the first! It is all over—the toil of months—the object of my life! I am ruined!"

And there he sat, in strange despair, until his lamp flickered in the socket and left the Artist of the Beautiful in darkness.

Thus it is that ideas, which grow up within the imagination and appear so lovely to it and of a value beyond whatever men call valuable, are exposed to be shattered and annihilated by contact with the practical. It is requisite for the ideal artist to possess a force of character that seems hardly compatible with its delicacy; he must keep his faith in himself while the incredulous world assails him with its utter disbelief; he must stand up against mankind and be his own sole disciple, both as respects his genius and the objects to which it is directed.

For a time Owen Warland succumbed to this severe but inevitable test. He spent a few sluggish weeks with his head so continually resting in his hands that the towns-people had scarcely an opportunity to see his countenance. When at last it was again uplifted to the light of day, a cold, dull, nameless change was perceptible upon it. In the opinion of Peter Hovenden, however, and that order of sagacious understandings who think that life should be regulated, like clockwork, with leaden weights, the alteration was entirely for the better. Owen now, indeed, applied himself to business with dogged industry. It was marvellous to witness the obtuse gravity with which he would inspect the wheels of a great old silver watch thereby delighting the owner, in whose fob it had been worn till he deemed it a portion of his own life, and was accordingly jealous of its treatment. In consequence of the good report thus acquired, Owen Warland was invited by the proper authorities to regulate the clock in the church steeple. He succeeded so admirably in this matter of public interest that the merchants gruffly acknowledged his merits on ‘Change; the nurse whispered his praises, as she gave the potion in the sick-chamber; the lover blessed him at the hour of appointed interview; and the town in general thanked Owen for the punctuality of dinner time. In a word, the heavy weight upon his spirits kept everything in order, not merely within his own system, but wheresoever the iron accents of the church clock were audible. It was a circumstance, though minute, yet characteristic of his present state, that, when employed to engrave names or initials on silver spoons, he now wrote the requisite letters in the plainest possible style; omitting a variety of fanciful flourishes that had heretofore distinguished his work in this kind.

One day, during the era of this happy transformation, old Peter Hovenden came to visit his former apprentice.

“Well, Owen,” said he, “I am glad to hear such good accounts of you from all quarters, and especially from the town clock yonder, which speaks in your commendation every hour of the twenty-four. Only get rid altogether of your nonsensical trash about the beautiful, which I, nor nobody else, nor yourself to boot, could ever understand—only free yourself of that, and your success in life is as sure as daylight. Why, if you go on in this way, I should even venture to let you doctor this precious old watch of mine; though, except my daughter Annie, I have nothing else so valuable in the world.”

“I should hardly dare touch it, sir,” replied Owen in a depressed tone; for he was weighed down by his old master’s presence.

“In time,” said the latter,— “In time, you will be capable of it.”

The old watchmaker, with the freedom naturally consequent on his former authority, went on inspecting the work which Owen had in hand at the moment, together with other matters that were in progress. The artist, meanwhile, could scarcely lift his head. There was nothing so antipodal to his nature as this man’s cold, unimaginative sagacity, by contact with which everything was converted into a dream except the densest matter of the physical world. Owen groaned in spirit and prayed fervently to be delivered from him.

“But what is this?” cried Peter Hovenden abruptly, taking up a dusty bell glass, beneath which appeared a mechanical something, as delicate and minute as the system of a butterfly’s anatomy. “What have we here! Owen! Owen! there is witchcraft in these little chains, and wheels, and paddles! See! with one pinch of my finger and thumb I am going to deliver you from all future peril.”

“For Heaven’s sake,” screamed Owen Warland, springing up with wonderful energy, “as you would not drive me mad, do not touch it! The slightest pressure of your finger would

ruin me for ever.”

“Aha, young man! And is it so?” said the old watchmaker, looking at him with just enough penetration to torture Owen’s soul with the bitterness of worldly criticism. “Well, take your own course; but I warn you again that in this small piece of mechanism lives your evil spirit. Shall I exorcise him?”

“You are my evil spirit,” answered Owen, much excited—“you and the hard, coarse world! The leaden thoughts and the despondency that you fling upon me are my clogs, else I should long ago have achieved the task that I was created for.”

Peter Hovenden shook his head, with the mixture of contempt and indignation which mankind, of whom he was partly a representative, deem themselves entitled to feel towards all simpletons who seek other prizes than the dusty one along the highway. He then took his leave, with an uplifted finger and a sneer upon his face that haunted the artist’s dreams for many a night afterwards. At the time of his old master’s visit, Owen was probably on the point of taking up the relinquished task; but, by this sinister event, he was thrown back into the state whence he had been slowly emerging.

But the innate tendency of his soul had only been accumulating fresh vigor during its apparent sluggishness. As the summer advanced he almost totally relinquished his business, and permitted Father Time, so far as the old gentleman was represented by the clocks and watches under his control, to stray at random through human life, making infinite confusion among the train of bewildered hours. He wasted the sunshine, as people said, in wandering through the woods and fields and along the banks of streams. There, like a child, he found amusement in chasing butterflies or watching the motions of water-insects. There was something truly mysterious in the intentness with which he contemplated these living playthings as they sported on the breeze or examined the structure of an imperial insect whom he had imprisoned. The chase of butterflies was an apt emblem of the ideal pursuit in which he had spent so many golden hours; but would the beautiful idea ever be yielded to his hand, like the butterfly that symbolized it? Sweet, doubtless, were these days, and congenial to the artist’s soul. They were full of bright conceptions, which gleamed through his intellectual world as the butterflies gleamed through the outward atmosphere, and were real to him for the instant, without the toil, and perplexity, and many disappointments of attempting to make them visible to the sensual eye. Alas that the artist, whether in poetry, or whatever other material, may not content himself with the inward enjoyment of the beautiful, but must chase the flitting mystery beyond the verge of his ethereal domain, and crush its frail being in seizing it with a material grasp. Owen Warland felt the impulse to give external reality to his ideas as irresistibly as any of the poets or painters who have arrayed the world in a dimmer and fainter beauty, imperfectly copied from the richness of their visions.

The night was now his time for the slow progress of re-creating the one idea to which all his intellectual activity referred itself. Always at the approach of dusk he stole into the town, locked himself within his shop, and wrought with patient delicacy of touch for many hours. Sometimes he was startled by the rap of the watchman, who, when all the world should be asleep, had caught the gleam of lamplight through the crevices of Owen Warland’s shutters. Daylight, to the morbid sensibility of his mind, seemed to have an intrusiveness that interfered with his pursuits. On cloudy and inclement days, therefore, he sat with his head upon his hands, muffling, as it were, his sensitive brain in a mist of indefinite musings, for it was a relief to escape from the sharp distinctness with which he was compelled to shape out his thoughts

during his nightly toil.

From one of these fits of torpor he was aroused by the entrance of Annie Hovenden, who came into the shop with the freedom of a customer, and also with something of the familiarity of a childish friend. She had worn a hole through her silver thimble, and wanted Owen to repair it.

“But I don’t know whether you will condescend to such a task,” said she, laughing, “now that you are so taken up with the notion of putting spirit into machinery.”

“Where did you get that idea, Annie?” said Owen, starting in surprise.

“Oh, out of my own head,” answered she, “and from something that I heard you say, long ago, when you were but a boy and I a little child. But come, will you mend this poor thimble of mine?”

“Anything for your sake, Annie,” said Owen Warland—“anything, even were it to work at Robert Danforth’s forge.”

“And that would be a pretty sight!” retorted Annie, glancing with imperceptible slightness at the artist’s small and slender frame. “Well; here is the thimble.”

“But that is a strange idea of yours,” said Owen, “about the spiritualization of matter!”

And then the thought stole into his mind that this young girl possessed the gift to comprehend him better than all the world beside. And what a help and strength would it be to him in his lonely toil if he could gain the sympathy of the only being whom he loved! To persons whose pursuits are insulated from the common business of life—who are either in advance of mankind or apart from it—there often comes a sensation of moral cold that makes the spirit shiver as if it had reached the frozen solitudes around the pole. What the prophet, the poet, the reformer, the criminal, or any other man with human yearnings, but separated from the multitude by a peculiar lot, might feel, poor Owen Warland felt.

“Annie,” cried he, growing pale as death at the thought, “how gladly would I tell you the secret of my pursuit! You, methinks, would estimate it rightly. You, I know, would hear it with a reverence that I must not expect from the harsh, material world.”

“Would I not! to be sure I would!” replied Annie Hovenden, lightly laughing. “Come; explain to me quickly what is the meaning of this little whirligig, so delicately wrought that it might be a plaything for Queen Mab. See! I will put it in motion.”

“Hold,” exclaimed Owen, “hold!”

Annie had but given the slightest possible touch, with the point of a needle, to the same minute portion of complicated machinery which has been more than once mentioned, when the artist seized her by the wrist with a force that made her scream aloud. She was affrighted at the convulsion of intense rage and anguish that writhed across his features. The next instant he let his head sink upon his hands.

“Go, Annie,” murmured he; “I have deceived myself, and must suffer for it. I yearned for sympathy, and thought, and fancied, and dreamed that you might give it me; but you lack the talisman, Annie, that should admit you into my secrets. That touch has undone the toil of months and the thought of a lifetime! It was not your fault, Annie; but you have ruined me!”

Poor Owen Warland! He had indeed erred, yet pardonably; for if any human spirit could have sufficiently revered the processes so sacred in his eyes, it must have been a woman’s. Even Annie Hovenden, possibly might not have disappointed him had she been enlightened by the deep intelligence of love.

The artist spent the ensuing winter in a way that satisfied any persons who had hitherto



retained a hopeful opinion of him that he was, in truth, irrevocably doomed to unutility as regarded the world, and to an evil destiny on his own part. The decease of a relative had put him in possession of a small inheritance. Thus freed from the necessity of toil, and having lost the steadfast influence of a great purpose—great, at least, to him—he abandoned himself to habits from which it might have been supposed the mere delicacy of his organization would have availed to secure him. But when the ethereal portion of a man of genius is obscured the earthly part assumes an influence the more uncontrollable, because the character is now thrown off the balance to which Providence had so nicely adjusted it, and which, in coarser natures, is adjusted by some other method. Owen Warland made proof of whatever show of bliss may be found in riot. He looked at the world through the golden medium of wine, and contemplated the visions that bubble up so gaily around the brim of the glass, and that people the air with shapes of pleasant madness, which so soon grow ghostly and forlorn. Even when this dismal and inevitable change had taken place, the young man might still have continued to quaff the cup of enchantments, though its vapor did but shroud life in gloom and fill the gloom with spectres that mocked at him. There was a certain irksomeness of spirit, which, being real, and the deepest sensation of which the artist was now conscious, was more intolerable than any fantastic miseries and horrors that the abuse of wine could summon up. In the latter case he could remember, even out of the midst of his trouble, that all was but a delusion; in the former, the heavy anguish was his actual life.

From this perilous state he was redeemed by an incident which more than one person witnessed, but of which the shrewdest could not explain nor conjecture the operation on Owen Warland's mind. It was very simple. On a warm afternoon of spring, as the artist sat among his riotous companions with a glass of wine before him, a splendid butterfly flew in at the open window and fluttered about his head.

"Ah," exclaimed Owen, who had drunk freely, "are you alive again, child of the sun and playmate of the summer breeze, after your dismal winter's nap! Then it is time for me to be at work!"

And, leaving his unemptied glass upon the table, he departed and was never known to sip another drop of wine.

And now, again, he resumed his wanderings in the woods and fields. It might be fancied that the bright butterfly, which had come so spirit-like into the window as Owen sat with the rude revellers, was indeed a spirit commissioned to recall him to the pure, ideal life that had so etherealized him among men. It might be fancied that he went forth to seek this spirit, in its sunny haunts; for still, as in the summer time gone by, he was seen to steal gently up wherever a butterfly had alighted, and lose himself in contemplation of it. When it took flight his eyes followed the winged vision, as if its airy track would show the path to Heaven. But what could be the purpose of the unseasonable toil, which was again resumed, as the watchman knew by the lines of lamplight through the crevices of Owen Warland's shutters? The towns-people had one comprehensive explanation of all these singularities. Owen Warland had gone mad! How universally efficacious—how satisfactory, too, and soothing to the injured sensibility of narrowness and dullness—is this easy method of accounting for whatever lies beyond the world's most ordinary scope! From Saint Paul's days down to our poor little Artist of the Beautiful, the same talisman had been applied to the elucidation of all mysteries in the words or deeds of men who spoke or acted too wisely or too well. In Owen Warland's case the judgment of his townspeople may have been correct. Perhaps he was mad. The lack of

sympathy—that contrast between himself and his neighbors which took away the restraint of example—was enough to make him so. Or possibly he had caught just so much of ethereal radiance as served to bewilder him, in an earthly sense, by its intermixture with the common day light.

One evening, when the artist had returned from a customary ramble and had just thrown the lustre of his lamp on the delicate piece of work so often interrupted, but still taken up again, as if his fate were embodied in its mechanism, he was surprised by the entrance of old Peter Hovenden. Owen never met this man without a shrinking of the heart. Of all the world he was most terrible, by reason of a keen understanding which saw so distinctly what it did see, and disbelieved so uncompromisingly in what it could not see. On this occasion the old watchmaker had merely a gracious word or two to say.

“Owen, my lad,” said he, “we must see you at my house to-morrow night.”

The artist began to mutter some excuse.

“Oh, but it must be so,” quoth Peter Hovenden, “for the sake of the days when you were one of the household. What, my boy! don’t you know that my daughter Annie is engaged to Robert Danforth? We are making an entertainment, in our humble way, to celebrate the event.”

“Ah!” said Owen.

That little monosyllable was all he uttered; its tone seemed cold and unconcerned to an ear like Peter Hovenden’s; and yet there was in it the stifled outcry of the poor artist’s heart, which he compressed within him like a man holding down an evil spirit. One slight outbreak, however, imperceptible to the old watchmaker, he allowed himself. Raising the instrument with which he was about to begin his work, he let it fall upon the little system of machinery that had, anew, cost him months of thought and toil. It was shattered by the stroke!

Owen Warland’s story would have been no tolerable representation of the troubled life of those who strive to create the beautiful, if, amid all other thwarting influences, love had not interposed to steal the cunning from his hand. Outwardly he had been no ardent or enterprising lover; the career of his passion had confined its tumults and vicissitudes so entirely within the artist’s imagination that Annie herself had scarcely more than a woman’s intuitive perception of it; but, in Owen’s view, it covered the whole field of his life. Forgetful of the time when she had shown herself incapable of any deep response, he had persisted in connecting all his dreams of artistical success with Annie’s image; she was the visible shape in which the spiritual power that he worshipped, and on whose altar he hoped to lay a not unworthy offering, was made manifest to him. Of course he had deceived himself; there were no such attributes in Annie Hovenden as his imagination had endowed her with. She, in the aspect which she wore to his inward vision, was as much a creation of his own, as the mysterious piece of mechanism would be were it ever realized. Had he become convinced of his mistake through the medium of successful love—had he won Annie to his bosom, and there beheld her fade from angel into ordinary woman,—the disappointment might have driven him back, with concentrated energy, upon his sole remaining object. On the other hand, had he found Annie what he fancied, his lot would have been so rich in beauty that out of its mere redundancy he might have wrought the beautiful into many a worthier type than he had toiled for; but the guise in which his sorrow came to him, the sense that the angel of his life had been snatched away and given to a rude man of earth and iron, who could neither need nor appreciate her ministrations;—this was the very perversity of fate that makes human existence appear too

absurd and contradictory to be the scene of one other hope or one other fear. There was nothing left for Owen Warland but to sit down like a man that had been stunned.

He went through a fit of illness. After his recovery his small and slender frame assumed an obtuser garniture of flesh than it had ever before worn. His thin cheeks became round; his delicate little hand, so spiritually fashioned to achieve fairy task-work, grew plumper than the hand of a thriving infant. His aspect had a childishness such as might have induced a stranger to pat him on the head—pausing, however, in the act, to wonder what manner of child was here. It was as if the spirit had gone out of him, leaving the body to flourish in a sort of vegetable existence. Not that Owen Warland was idiotic. He could talk, and not irrationally. Somewhat of a babbler, indeed, did people begin to think him; for he was apt to discourse at wearisome length of marvels of mechanism that he had read about in books, but which he had learned to consider as absolutely fabulous. Among them he enumerated the Man of Brass, constructed by Albertus Magnus, and the Brazen Head of Friar Bacon; and, coming down to later times, the automata of a little coach and horses, which it was pretended had been manufactured for the Dauphin of France; together with an insect that buzzed about the ear like a living fly, and yet was but a contrivance of minute steel springs. There was a story, too, of a duck that waddled, and quacked, and ate; though, had any honest citizen purchased it for dinner, he would have found himself cheated with the mere mechanical apparition of a duck.

“But all these accounts,” said Owen Warland, “I am now satisfied, are mere impositions.”

Then, in a mysterious way, he would confess that he once thought differently. In his idle and dreamy days he had considered it possible, in a certain sense, to spiritualize machinery, and to combine with the new species of life and motion thus produced a beauty that should attain to the ideal which Nature has proposed to herself in all her creatures, but has never taken pains to realize. He seemed, however, to retain no very distinct perception either of the process of achieving this object, or of the design itself.

“I have thrown it all aside now,” he would say. “It was a dream such as young men are always mystifying themselves with. Now that I have acquired a little common sense, it makes me laugh to think of it.”

Poor, poor and fallen Owen Warland! These were the symptoms that he had ceased to be an inhabitant of the better sphere that lies unseen around us. He had lost his faith in the invisible, and now prided himself, as such unfortunates invariably do, in the wisdom which rejected much that even his eye could see, and trusted confidently in nothing but what his hand could touch. This is the calamity of men whose spiritual part dies out of them and leaves the grosser understanding to assimilate them more and more to the things of which alone it can take cognizance; but in Owen Warland the spirit was not dead nor past away; it only slept.

How it awoke again is not recorded. Perhaps the torpid slumber was broken by a convulsive pain. Perhaps, as in a former instance, the butterfly came and hovered about his head, and re-inspired him—as indeed this creature of the sunshine had always a mysterious mission for the artist,—re-inspired him with the former purpose of his life. Whether it were pain or happiness that thrilled through his veins, his first impulse was to thank Heaven for rendering him again the being of thought, imagination, and keenest sensibility that he had long ceased to be.

“Now for my task,” said he. “Never did I feel such strength for it as now.”

Yet, strong as he felt himself, he was incited to toil the more diligently by an anxiety lest death should surprise him in the midst of his labors. This anxiety, perhaps, is common to

all men who set their hearts upon anything so high, in their own view of it, that life becomes of importance only as conditional to its accomplishment. So long as we love life for itself, we seldom dread the losing it. When we desire life for the attainment of an object, we recognize the frailty of its texture. But, side by side with this sense of insecurity, there is a vital faith in our invulnerability to the shaft of death while engaged in any task that seems assigned by Providence as our proper thing to do, and which the world would have cause to mourn for should we leave it unaccomplished. Can the philosopher, big with the inspiration of an idea that is to reform mankind, believe that he is to be beckoned from this sensible existence at the very instant when he is mustering his breath to speak the word of light? Should he perish so, the weary ages may pass away—the world's, whose life sand may fall, drop by drop—before another intellect is prepared to develop the truth that might have been uttered then. But history affords many an example where the most precious spirit, at any particular epoch manifested in human shape, has gone hence untimely, without space allowed him, so far as mortal judgment could discern, to perform his mission on the earth. The prophet dies, and the man of torpid heart and sluggish brain lives on. The poet leaves his song half sung, or finishes it, beyond the scope of mortal ears, in a celestial choir. The painter—as Allston did—leaves half his conception on the canvas to sadden us with its imperfect beauty, and goes to picture forth the whole, if it be no irreverence to say so, in the hues of Heaven. But rather such incomplete designs of this life will be perfected nowhere. This so frequent abortion of man's dearest projects must be taken as a proof that the deeds of earth, however etherealized by piety or genius, are without value, except as exercises and manifestations of the spirit. In Heaven, all ordinary thought is higher and more melodious than Milton's song. Then, would he add another verse to any strain that he had left unfinished here?

But to return to Owen Warland. It was his fortune, good or ill, to achieve the purpose of his life. Pass we over a long space of intense thought, yearning effort, minute toil, and wasting anxiety, succeeded by an instant of solitary triumph: let all this be imagined; and then behold the artist, on a winter evening, seeking admittance to Robert Danforth's fireside circle. There he found the man of iron, with his massive substance thoroughly warmed and attempered by domestic influences. And there was Annie, too, now transformed into a matron, with much of her husband's plain and sturdy nature, but imbued, as Owen Warland still believed, with a finer grace, that might enable her to be the interpreter between strength and beauty. It happened, likewise, that old Peter Hovenden was a guest this evening at his daughter's fireside, and it was his well-remembered expression of keen, cold criticism that first encountered the artist's glance.

"My old friend Owen!" cried Robert Danforth, starting up, and compressing the artist's delicate fingers within a hand that was accustomed to gripe bars of iron. "This is kind and neighborly to come to us at last. I was afraid your perpetual motion had bewitched you out of the remembrance of old times."

"We are glad to see you!" said Annie, while a blush reddened her matronly cheek. "It was not like a friend to stay from us so long."

"Well, Owen," inquired the old watchmaker, as his first greeting, "how comes on the beautiful? Have you created it at last?"

The artist did not immediately reply, being startled by the apparition of a young child of strength that was tumbling about on the carpet,—a little personage who had come mysteriously out of the infinite, but with something so sturdy and real in his composition that

he seemed moulded out of the densest substance which earth could supply. This hopeful infant crawled towards the new-comer, and setting himself on end, as Robert Danforth expressed the posture, stared at Owen with a look of such sagacious observation that the mother could not help exchanging a proud glance with her husband. But the artist was disturbed by the child's look, as imagining a resemblance between it and Peter Hovenden's habitual expression. He could have fancied that the old watchmaker was compressed into this baby shape, and looking out of those baby eyes, and repeating—as he now did—the malicious question: “The beautiful, Owen! How comes on the beautiful? Have you succeeded in creating the beautiful?”

“I have succeeded,” replied the artist, with a momentary light of triumph in his eyes and a smile of sunshine, yet steeped in such depth of thought that it was almost sadness. “Yes, my friends, it is the truth. I have succeeded.”

“Indeed!” cried Annie, a look of maiden mirthfulness peeping out of her face again. “And is it lawful, now, to inquire what the secret is?”

“Surely; it is to disclose it that I have come,” answered Owen Warland. “You shall know, and see, and touch, and possess the secret! For, Annie—if by that name I may still address the friend of my boyish years—Annie, it is for your bridal gift that I have wrought this spiritualized mechanism, this harmony of motion, this mystery of beauty! It comes late, indeed; but it is as we go onward in life, when objects begin to lose their freshness of hue, and our souls their delicacy of perception, that the spirit of beauty is most needed. If—forgive me, Annie—if you know how to value this gift, it can never come too late.”

He produced, as he spoke, what seemed a jewel box. It was carved richly out of ebony by his own hand, and inlaid with a fanciful tracery of pearl, representing a boy in pursuit of a butterfly, which, elsewhere, had become a winged spirit, and was flying heavenward; while the boy, or youth, had found such efficacy in his strong desire, that he ascended from earth to cloud, and from cloud to celestial atmosphere, to win the beautiful. This case of ebony the artist opened, and bade Annie place her finger on its edge. She did so, but almost screamed as a butterfly fluttered forth, and, alighting on her finger's tip, sat waving the ample magnificence of its purple and gold-speckled wings, as if in prelude to a flight. It is impossible to express by words the glory, the splendor, the delicate gorgeousness, which were softened into the beauty of this object. Nature's ideal butterfly was here realized in all its perfection; not in the pattern of such faded insects as flit among earthly flowers, but of those which hover across the meads of paradise for child angels and the spirits of departed infants to disport themselves with. The rich down was visible upon its wings; the lustre of its eyes seemed instinct with spirit. The firelight glimmered around this wonder—the candles gleamed upon it; but it glistened apparently by its own radiance, and illuminated the finger and outstretched hand on which it rested with a white gleam like that of precious stones. In its perfect beauty, the consideration of size was entirely lost. Had its wings overreached the firmament, the mind could not have been more filled or satisfied.

“Beautiful! beautiful!” exclaimed Annie. “Is it alive? Is it alive?”

“Alive? To be sure it is,” answered her husband. “Do you suppose any mortal has skill enough to make a butterfly, or would put himself to the trouble of making one, when any child may catch a score of them in a summer's afternoon? Alive? Certainly! But this pretty box is undoubtedly of our friend Owen's manufacture; and really it does him credit.”

At this moment the butterfly waved its wings anew, with a motion so absolutely lifelike that Annie was startled, and even awe-stricken; for, in spite of her husband's opinion, she could

not satisfy herself whether it was indeed a living creature or a piece of wondrous mechanism.

“Is it alive?” she repeated, more earnestly than before.

“Judge for yourself,” said Owen Warland, who stood gazing in her face with fixed attention.

The butterfly now flung itself upon the air, fluttered round Annie’s head, and soared into a distant region of the parlor, still making itself perceptible to sight by the starry gleam in which the motion of its wings enveloped it. The infant on the floor followed its course with his sagacious little eyes. After flying about the room, it returned in a spiral curve and settled again on Annie’s finger.

“But is it alive?” exclaimed she again; and the finger on which the gorgeous mystery had alighted was so tremulous that the butterfly was forced to balance himself with his wings. “Tell me if it be alive, or whether you created it?”

“Wherefore ask who created it, so it be beautiful?” replied Owen Warland. “Alive? Yes, Annie; it may well be said to possess life, for it has absorbed my own being into itself; and in the secret of that butterfly, and in its beauty—which is not merely outward, but deep as its whole system,—is represented the intellect, the imagination, the sensibility, the soul of an Artist of the Beautiful! Yes; I created it. But”—and here his countenance somewhat changed—“this butterfly is not now to me what it was when I beheld it afar off in the day-dreams of my youth.”

“Be it what it may, it is a pretty plaything,” said the blacksmith, grinning with childlike delight. “I wonder whether it would condescend to alight on such a great clumsy finger as mine? Hold it hither, Annie!”

By the artist’s direction, Annie touched her finger’s tip to that of her husband; and, after a momentary delay, the butterfly fluttered from one to the other. It precluded a second flight by a similar, yet not precisely the same, waving of wings as in the first experiment; then, ascending from the blacksmith’s stalwart finger, it rose in a gradually enlarging curve to the ceiling, made one wide sweep around the room, and returned with an undulating movement to the point whence it had started.

“Well, that does beat all nature!” cried Robert Danforth, bestowing the heartiest praise that he could find expression for; and, indeed, had he paused there, a man of finer words and nicer perception could not easily have said more. “That goes beyond me, I confess! But what then? There is more real use in one downright blow of my sledge hammer than in the whole five years’ labor that our friend Owen has wasted on this butterfly!”

Here the child clapped his hands and made a great babble of indistinct utterance, apparently demanding that the butterfly should be given him for a plaything.

Owen Warland, meanwhile, glanced sidelong at Annie, to discover whether she sympathized in her husband’s estimate of the comparative value of the beautiful and the practical. There was, amid all her kindness towards himself, amid all the wonder and admiration with which she contemplated the marvellous work of his hands and incarnation of his ideal, a secret scorn; too secret, perhaps, for her own consciousness, and perceptible only to such intuitive discernment as that of the artist. But Owen, in the latter stages of his pursuit, had risen out of the region in which such a discovery might have been torture. He knew that the world, and Annie as the representative of the world, whatever praise might be bestowed, could never say the fitting word nor feel the fitting sentiment which should be the perfect recompense of an artist who, symbolizing a lofty moral by a material trifle,—converting what

was earthly to spiritual gold—had won the beautiful into his handiwork. Not at this latest moment was he to learn that the reward of all high performance must be sought within itself, or sought in vain. There was, however, a view of the matter, which Annie and her husband, and even Peter Hovenden, might fully have understood, and which would have satisfied them that the toil of years had here been worthily bestowed. Owen Warland might have told them that this butterfly, this plaything, this bridal gift of a poor watchmaker to a blacksmith's wife, was, in truth, a gem of art that a monarch would have purchased with honors and abundant wealth, and have treasured it among the jewels of his kingdom, as the most unique and wondrous of them all. But the artist smiled and kept the secret to himself.

"Father," said Annie, thinking that a word of praise from the old watchmaker might gratify his former apprentice, "do come and admire this pretty butterfly!"

"Let us see," said Peter Hovenden, rising from his chair, with a sneer upon his face that always made people doubt, as he himself did, in everything but a material existence. "Here is my finger for it to alight upon. I shall understand it better when once I have touched it."

But, to the increased astonishment of Annie, when the tip of her father's finger was pressed against that of her husband, on which the butterfly still rested, the insect drooped its wings and seemed on the point of falling to the floor. Even the bright spots of gold upon its wings and body, unless her eyes deceived her, grew dim, and the glowing purple took a dusky hue, and the starry lustre that gleamed around the blacksmith's hand became faint and vanished.

"It is dying! it is dying!" cried Annie, in alarm.

"It has been delicately wrought," said the artist, calmly. "As I told you, it has imbibed a spiritual essence—call it magnetism, or what you will. In an atmosphere of doubt and mockery its exquisite susceptibility suffers torture, as does the soul of him who instilled his own life into it. It has already lost its beauty; in a few moments more its mechanism would be irreparably injured."

"Take away your hand, father!" entreated Annie, turning pale. "Here is my child; let it rest on his innocent hand. There, perhaps, its life will revive and its colors grow brighter than ever."

Her father, with an acrid smile, withdrew his finger. The butterfly then appeared to recover the power of voluntary motion, while its hues assumed much of their original lustre, and the gleam of starlight, which was its most ethereal attribute, again formed a halo round about it. At first, when transferred from Robert Danforth's hand to the small finger of the child, this radiance grew so powerful that it positively threw the little fellow's shadow back against the wall. He, meanwhile, extended his plump hand as he had seen his father and mother do, and watched the waving of the insect's wings with infantine delight. Nevertheless, there was a certain odd expression of sagacity that made Owen Warland feel as if here were old Peter Hovenden, partially, and but partially, redeemed from his hard scepticism into childish faith.

"How wise the little monkey looks!" whispered Robert Danforth to his wife.

"I never saw such a look on a child's face," answered Annie, admiring her own infant, and with good reason, far more than the artistic butterfly. "The darling knows more of the mystery than we do."

As if the butterfly, like the artist, were conscious of something not entirely congenial in the child's nature, it alternately sparkled and grew dim. At length it arose from the small

hand of the infant with an airy motion that seemed to bear it upward without an effort, as if the ethereal instincts with which its master's spirit had endowed it impelled this fair vision involuntarily to a higher sphere. Had there been no obstruction, it might have soared into the sky and grown immortal. But its lustre gleamed upon the ceiling; the exquisite texture of its wings brushed against that earthly medium; and a sparkle or two, as of stardust, floated downward and lay glimmering on the carpet. Then the butterfly came fluttering down, and, instead of returning to the infant, was apparently attracted towards the artist's hand.

"Not so! not so!" murmured Owen Warland, as if his handiwork could have understood him. "Thou hast gone forth out of thy master's heart. There is no return for thee!"

With a wavering movement, and emitting a tremulous radiance, the butterfly struggled, as it were, towards the infant, and was about to alight upon his finger; but while it still hovered in the air, the little child of strength, with his grandsire's sharp and shrewd expression in his face, made a snatch at the marvellous insect and compressed it in his hand. Annie screamed. Old Peter Hovenden burst into a cold and scornful laugh. The blacksmith, by main force, unclosed the infant's hand, and found within the palm a small heap of glittering fragments, whence the mystery of beauty had fled forever. And as for Owen Warland, he looked placidly at what seemed the ruin of his life's labor, and which yet was no ruin. He had caught a far other butterfly than this. When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality.

* * * * *



Martina Newberry



At Night

All day,
 I thought of the city,
 of freeways and
 overpasses and
 tunnels long enough
 that you might be afraid
 there is no end to them.
 When late afternoon came,
 it came with
 a pissy attitude and
 solar temper.
 I closed my eyes
 tight like gritted teeth.
 Every night we are
 newly dead and
 every morning, newly born.
 That alone should make me happy, but it doesn't.
 What does?
 The thought of my good bed,
 My dreams of concrete clouds,
 Air that smells like old clothes,
 The eccentric lamplight on sputtering streets,
 The ominous openings of alleys.
 Now it's late.
 My neighbor's vodka
 has numbed my tongue
 but not my heart
 which is holding a grudge.
 Perhaps I should meditate.
 Or take drugs.
 The choice between Shiva and Seroquel
 is not always a wise one.
 Tonight may be one of those nights
 when sleep is a joke I tell myself.
 Tonight may be one of those nights
 when holding on
 to the mattress
 is as close as I'll ever get
 to Nirvana.

* * *

Elegy

You will be led to a place behind
the white concrete building.
Your hands will be tied.
Gently as putting a bit
in a horse's mouth, a
black handkerchief will be tied
around your eyes.
The firing squad will be
made up of you dead parents,
your children, your ex-spouses.
they'll be given your life story
on a postage stamp
to stick on to the envelope
that becomes home to
your bloodless heart.

* * *

Cremation

Once upon a time,
in the middle of the night,
in the middle of a thunderstorm,
in the middle of my life,
a woman came to my bed to be held.
She stayed until the sky
no longer needed lightning to see itself.
I wasn't sure then which laws applied
to the situation and now it doesn't matter.
When I sift through
the boxed ashes of that night,
I find some other person's bones and teeth.
I wonder where she is now.

* * *

Because You've Lived

Because you've lived
is reason enough to die.
Love stays on,
hunger stays on,
the sky stays on.
Real as grit,
you'll be here again

* * * * *

R is for Rambo

[Essay]

Have you ever imagined a favorite actor as single, only to learn that he's been married for years? Letters are like that. Learning them one by one, we imagine them all as independent, but the first thing you're taught in linguistics class is that most letters are paired off in categories: the sibilants S and Z, the nasals M and N, and the so-called "liquid" consonants R and L. The last two are the alphabet's most fascinating couple, the Rogue and the Lady. I'm hardly the first to assign sexes to R and L or to comment on their characters, but I don't believe anyone has ever fully connected their characters to the water imagery implicit in their label "liquids." If both letters symbolize water, then L is a quiet lake or lowland brook, and R is a raging RIVER thundering down the hills.

"About three hours into this expedition," says nature writer John Hanson Mitchell, "I came upon a mountain stream. Actually, I heard the stream before I saw it, a *dark, throaty growl* that filled the trees and evolved into a deafening *roar* as I approached." Following the "*rushing* waters" to the edge of a cliff, the writer scrambled down the rocks and sat "at the base of the falls, contemplating the awesome force of the cascade of green water, the immense overwhelming *roar*."

Noise, speed, and commotion: a perfect R experience.

Ruckus

Over the centuries, R has garnered far more comment than any other letter, precisely because it is so noisy. The "rubadub in the orchestra of language," Otto Jespersen called it. Or the *grrrr*rowing dog. Just as our nature writer John Mitchell first noticed his mountain stream as a distant growl, Dr. Johnson heard R as a "rough *snarling* sound." The Romans frankly nicknamed it the *canina littera*, the dog's letter.

But noise is only half of it. Plato, the earliest commentator, called R the letter of movement. He guessed that R appears in so many 'moving' words (*roll, rush, run*) because the tongue is "most agitated and least at rest in the pronunciation of this letter." As a matter of fact, *r* does take more muscular effort to pronounce than most sounds, especially the vivid "rolled" *r* used in countries like Spain and Scotland. The tongue-tip actually flicks *five times* to trill the initial *r* in a Spanish word like *ruido*. And what does *ruido* mean? Noise!

Motion is noisy, and R is our letter for imitating it: "*rabid rednecks roaring* around" in their snowmobiles, "the jet engine *roar*, the *rumble* of the subway train, the *rattle* of the taxis." Same in the old song about the express train called the Wabash Cannonball: "with a *rattle*, a *rumble*, and a *roar*." R's whole scene is pretty lively: an "uproarious, *ribald romp*," "*raw, raucous, roistering, and real*." Its *rousing rhythms ring out* and *raise the roof*, and it can even squeeze out a plausible two-second history of popular music: *ragtime, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, reggae, rap*. When the Brooklyn Museum did a rap exhibit in 2000, they called it "*Roots, Rhymes, and Rage*."

Roaring Torrents

But the deep psychology of language is pre-industrial. Our distant ancestors never heard jets or bullet trains. Lions, thunder, wind, whitewater *rapids*, and angry warriors were their only emblems for overwhelming speed and noise. Concepts as important as those were apt to be embodied in human speech very early, mnemonically linked to specific sounds and further linked whenever possible to images of water and sex. It's notable that R and L have been called "liquid" consonants since ancient times: Latin *liquidae litterae*, from Greek *hygra stoicheia* 'wet sound'. L was always considered the soft one (Ben Jonson said it "melteth in the sounding") while R was the restless one: in watery terms like a noisy, fast-moving RIVER; and in gender terms like a noisy, fast-moving Man.

Let's start with rivers.

Plato did. He began discussing onomatopoeia in *Cratylus* by saying R was the letter most associated "with the expression of motion," and his first two (Greek) examples were "*rhein* (flow) and *rho?* (river)." Thus *river* in English, *río* in Spanish, *rivière* in French, *reka* in Slavic. Eighteenth-century writers like Leibniz, de Piis, and Charles de Brosses approvingly noted the R's in modern river names like *Rhine*, *Rhône*, and *Ruhr*, and Leibniz pointed out that the German words for 'move', 'flow', and 'roar' are *ruhren*, *rinnen*, *rauschen*. R's water-noise words pile up sky-high. French *ruisseau* 'stream' reminded Charles Nodier of "the gentle and continuous murmur of running water as it rolls among the pebbles." Spanish for 'torrent' is *raudal*, and 'ocean surf' is *resaca* or *rompientes*. In Plato's Greek, *rhotos* was the sound of crashing waves, and *rhotion* was both 'surf' and the din of sustained applause.

Having read quite a few descriptions of rivers recently, I can say that no one writes them in English without using at least a few R words, either in literal accounts like John Mitchell's (*rushing* waters, deafening *roar*) or in similes. Lee Smith says: "Time has picked up somehow, *roaring* along like a *furious current*." Martin Luther King loved to quote the prophet Amos: "let justice *roll* down like waters, and *righteousness* like a mighty stream." Any poet, any essayist, anybody at all, instinctively reaches for R's to evoke rivers.

Literature's most famous plea for decent onomatopoeia is found in Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*: "The sound must seem an echo to the sense." Can you guess what he said next? If Plato instinctively began discussing onomatopoeia by mentioning the letter R, and explaining R by mentioning rivers, is it any wonder that Alexander Pope began his own set of examples with an R-heavy couplet about raging water?

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.
Soft is the strain when zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when loud *surges* lash the sounding *shore*,
The *hoarse*, *rough* verse should like the *torrent roar*.

Rowdy

Who's hoarse and rough? Real men, that's who. Imagine a fast river howling over the rocks, compare it to a troop of spearmen charging along in full cry, and you'll see why R is

a man's letter, a *rowdy*, *rip-roarin'*, *rootin'-tootin'* letter that's *rarin'* to go—loud, amoral, and fast, like whitewater in March or red-blooded roughnecks awash in testosterone. The painter Caravaggio was a “*rogue*, *roué* and *reprobate*.” *Rugged*, *rude*, and *raffish*, like *robbers*, *rustlers*, *rakes*, and *racketeers*, or *rapsallions*, *renegades*, *roustabouts*, and *razorbacks*. These guys assault: *ram*, *rout*, *raze*, *raid*, *riot*, *ransack*, *ruin*, *rape*, *ravage*, *ravish*, *rip*, *rend*, *rive*, *rub out*.

Stallone was a boxer *Rocky* in one movie and an angry soldier *Rambo* in the next. Many loose cannons have R names—often rather ridiculous names whose only point seems to be to showcase the initial R as memorably as possible: *Rooster* Cogburn, *Race* Crim, *Jett Rink*, *Jack Reacher*—even *Jack the Ripper*. Similarly in romantic projections: Howard *Roark* in *The Fountainhead*, Mr. *Rochester* in *Jane Eyre*, *Rhett* Butler in *Gone With the Wind*. *Casablanca* has two R men, Bogart's lovelorn *Rick* and his randy friend Capt. *Renault*. Some of these men have hearts of gold and some do not, but all share a certain outer roughness; and since we see male roughness as a virtue, R names are a kind of praise. Abe Lincoln's contemporaries called him *Rail-Splitter*, Zachary Taylor was Old *Rough and Ready*, Teddy Roosevelt was the *Rough Rider*, and the Secret Service code-word for Ronald Reagan was *Rawhide*.

It startles me how often the word *rough* comes up in descriptions of R itself. Just as Dr. Johnson mentioned its “*rough* snarling sound,” the little girl in Kipling's alphabet story found it “all *rough* and edgy, like your shark-tooth saw,” and used a jagged line of cursive *r*'s to illustrate: *rrrrrrrrrrr*. In a French version of the same thought, Marcel Leiris said R “makes us hear a hoarse and grating rumble while it stands upright like a rocky escarpment,” with a “rugged profile” like *rocher* ‘rock’! Of course, it takes a lot of imagination, or suggestibility, to see a written R as a rocky cliff. The letter's original Semitic name *resh* meant ‘head’, and its earliest shape, preserved in the Greek letter rho (P), frankly shows a head perched on a neck. (Ancient Italians added the slant-line to distinguish R from P-for-*p*, their version of the old candy-cane Γ-for-*p* that Greeks now write as pi, Π.) If Leiris thinks he sees sharp rocks in R's shape, that just shows how thoroughly ingrained in our minds its roughness really is.

Rick & Ilsa

As I mentioned earlier, the two tough guys in *Casablanca* are R men. Bogart's *Rick* and his friend *Renault* talk fast and pack heat, while Bogie's old flame *Ilsa Lund* and her husband *Laszlo* speak softly and stroll around in cool tropical white. I can't imagine better personifications for the intricate gender dance that R and L perform in our minds every day. Even the lovers' names *Rick* and *Ilsa* are pitch-perfect for Anglophones stuck in Morocco. The top four male names England in 1200 were *William*, *Robert*, *Ralph*, and Rick's *Richard*—three R's in a row!—while every single L name in the Arabic section of the *Oxford Dictionary of First Names* is female: *Lamya*, *Lawahiz*, *Layla*, *Lina*, *Lubna*, *Lujayn*.

The marriage of opposites between R and L is old news. The Enlightenment scholars in Genette's *Mimologics* sum it up like well known gossip. Leibniz: “*r* = *violent movement* and *l* = *gentle movement*” (47). Marin Mersenne: “*l*, laziness; *r*, roughness” (348). Abbé Copineau: “the *color red*, which is vivid, lively, harsh to the sight, can be very aptly rendered by . . . *r*, which makes an analogous impression on the hearing,” as in *rose*, *ruby*, *ruddy*, *rouge*, *rojo*, *rufus*; while “gentle and weak light can also, for the same reason, be very aptly rendered by . . . *l*,” as in *flame*, *lamp*, *lantern* (355). Antoine Court de Gébelin: “*r* . . . is the consonant of rough, abrupt and noisy movements [and] of rugged, high, steep things. *L*, which is pronounced with

‘a very gentle and very smooth-flowing explosion’ of air . . . designates ‘gentle movements’ . . . and smooth-flowing things: *liqueurs*, *limpidité*, *lymphe*, *lait* (milk), *lac* (lake)” (103).

Twentieth-century experiments confirmed these intuitions: “in the antithesis *r/l* . . . we rediscover the Cratylid pair par excellence, the classic opposition between roughness and smoothness. For the Hungarian children questioned by Ivan Fonagy, *r* is a man and *l* is a woman: ‘The *r*,’ comments the author, ‘appears masculine on account of the greater muscular effort that it requires for production.’ For Chastaing’s [French-speaking] students, *r* evokes solid, hard, acrid, bitter, rugged, strong, violent, heavy, near; *l*, delicate, sleek, weak, easy-going, light, distant, bright” (321-22).

Honoruru

The bad news is that these oppositions show up mainly in Europe. I see no conspicuous violence or gentleness in Somali R and L words, for example; and many languages do not even use these sounds. (Unbelievably, not a single consonant exists that can be found in every human language—not even K, and certainly not L or R.) Japanese notoriously has no L, so it must spell *Honolulu* as *Honoruru*, and Hawaiian has only L, so *Merry Christmas* is *Mele Kalikimaka*. The Kwakiutl of British Columbia lack R but have five kinds of L, and the Great Plains Cheyenne have no L or R of any kind. None!

This is also true in certain types of English—specifically, the English of very young children, who talk about *widdo wed wagons*. R and L truly are difficult sounds, and it takes several years to develop the muscular control to say them both distinctly. Many languages remain content with a single halfway-between sound like the Japanese R. Nevertheless, I suspect that our finely wrought European oppositions exist as latent possibilities in the liquid sounds of any language, for we can sometimes see them flailing around in the primeval soup struggling to differentiate themselves. Japan’s single liquid may act soothingly L-like in *randa* ‘laziness’ and *suru-suru* ‘slip-slide’, but it has true R-like vigor in *raimei* ‘thunder’ and in *ran* ‘rebellion’—which happens to be the root of the wholly Japanese word *rambo* ‘violent’.

Hello? Mr. Stallone? I’ve got a great name for you!

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Five.

*“Out here on the perimeter there are no stars
Out here we is stoned—immaculate”*
—The Doors,
“The Wasp (Texas Radio & the Big Beat,” 1971.

“Walking city streets tonight with an idea, maybe a better recent idea, it may be folded up a few times, & come out slowly—

“In recent years, LSD & similar substances have been referred to, more commonly than psychedelics, as enteogens. Generating, causing, compelling the God within.

“But what of other approaches than one that is God-centered? What of an approach which does not place spirituality foremost? What of dropping acid not to see Godd or be Godd or know Godd.

“Neither an atheist nor agnostic approach either. One that works the landscape of realities without reference to a creator, a beginning from which all comes & an ending toward which all is tending?

“Always, ever, time a tool that may also be a trick—

“Psychedelic means mind- or soul-manifesting. Use of psychedelics brings out which is within, stuck there, or untapped, or perhaps even unknown.

“That said, there becomes more to work with, & here something happens. Dreams, desires, Art, each can be seen as materials to work with. Dreams. Eros. Nature. Art. Magick. Psychedelia.

“Once out, manifest, the world is changed a little, is a little more. Or, conversely, if one dives into dreaming more, the within is what changes, even before manifesting.

“I began writing 34 years ago, just now, crossed the midnight line into my anniversary, May 4, & how I viewed Art has shifted many times. I had youth’s ideas of fame, of being like the writers whose books I loved.

“It was more than 20 years ago I began to shift my thoughts, still a young man, still unknowing & yet believing I *could* know, & that knowing would bring me something. But I’d sent out my poems to magazines & got back form letter rejection slips, or sales brochures, or nothing. It took time from writing to beg this attention. Didn’t seem worth it—

“It was about 10 years ago I took writing classes & this didn’t work out either. I showed up with a different set of ideas from others. I didn’t want my work treated like half-formed clay, but my ideas to be confronted, & in turn to confront others their ideas. Three months &

I was out of that.

“I was already by then full of my own ideas, I’d do it myself, publishing my own works on my own dime, publish others’ works too. Subvert assumptions & pathways both.

“So I’ve long published all my work this way, in various forms, & found others to support in this way too.

“And yet—ideas have pecked at me that there’s more, that I’ve not finished my path, steps along, but there’s more.

“Much more. How do I meaningfully connect these various ideas? Art / Nature / Psychedelia / Dreams / Eros / Magick?

“So I nip again & again around this idea of *manifestation*. Being mortal, bodied, & working with it more & more varied. Not believing mortal life is beginning or end, but neither proclaiming what else. Disputing time as framework or guide, calling it tool & trying to live this.

“Manifestation, bring what is *within, out*. Diving in deeper to return to surface with more.

“Even more, dispute the legitimacy of within / without dichotomy. All is many, all is one . . . not enough . . . one is one, many is many, all is all . . . work perspective loose of where it limits, where it obscures.”

Pause. “Are you done?”

“I don’t know.”

“Will the story resume any time soon?”

“This *is* the story!”

“Sounds more like a rant.”

“All my work is one & several rants.”

“Why are you here?”

“This is where **RemoteLand** is made? You’re the man who makes it?”

“Who told you that?”

“I dreamed it.”

“Ahh. So I ‘manifested’ in your dreams?”

“I dreamed you. This restaurant. The train station next door. That you make films here & run your restaurant.”

“That I make **RemoteLand** here?”

“No. That’s my leap.”

“Ahh. You wed dream to Art & here we are.”

“Yes. Here we are.”

“And how long until I am abandoned like other ideas in this book?”

“Abandoned? No. Nothing is.”

“Nothing? Quite a lot.”

“No. In this section, in fact, I intend to return to many places & people & ideas in earlier pages, & take them along.”

“You like showing your bones, don’t you?”

“It’s all relevant.”

“Because for a few hours you’re crazed on the idea of manifestation? It won’t last.”

“But it manifested.”

“Like a bad shit.”

“No shit is bad.”

He laughs in my face. But then says, “I suppose not. At least, the alternative is worse.” I laugh now. I’m not sure we agree but there’s something between us.

“Manifested,” he says.

“You make **RemoteLand** around here?”

He doesn’t answer. Wipes down the counter between us. “I don’t know if I’d use the word ‘make.’ It’s not exactly something one makes.”

“Have you always been a film-maker?”

“No. Wasn’t my dream, I didn’t study on it. I don’t think I’d call myself one, exactly.”

“What then?”

His face wrinkles deeper. “Gate-keeper? No.”

“How does **RemoteLand** relate to the White Woods?”

He laughs, almost angry, but not at me, strangely. “Lots of words for essentially one thing, Mac.”

“They’re one?”

“You can’t get me to say what I don’t know, what I don’t have words for even my questions. But I will tell you one thing. I’ve thought about the word manifestation too. It’s not accurate but it’s like a floating marker in quicksand, if that’s possible. A beacon, maybe. Explains nothing but shines a little when you keep near it.”

I nod. “So I’m not completely off?”

“No. It’s not the worst step even if there might not be a path to follow.”

He serves me chili, very hot & spicy, in a beautiful blue bowl. Puts on a small black & white TV, news program. I eat, slowly, & we listen to baseball scores.

i.

What won’t come is music half-called, hungry hours, sunk in the province of men. Lights, simmering smells, bread & stew. Lure of wine & silk. Someone nods & says, “We’re mapping beauty, an hour nearer, a formula derived of striplings’ coos & closely tuned compass. More smoke, distraction’s distraction. Maybe the potion drunk an hour ago will able salve the next.”

I look back, over to the Gate-Keeper, not his title, calling him that anyway. He ignores me, serves several coffee, the radio is mumbling news, he won’t buy a TV for the joint like the regulars ask, they even offered to chip in ten bucks apiece. Refuses, tells them to drink their news straight, no pretty pictures to distract them. Pretty pictures are dangerous, he further warns, needlessly, they’ve given up for now, says he knows better than any of them, much, much better.

Won’t say a word to me, or even a glance. Like we never talked, like I don’t know. *Like I don’t fucking know.*

Music half-called rings back in blind cries & smoking metal. Sentiments & easy lusts. “Mapping beauty?” another says. “We can’t feed ourselves & save the trees alike. What beauty in a hungry child or burnt acre? Legions of men will be needed, maybe more than all this world holds. Legions of men & centuries of days before anything known, or we even begin.”

Can’t go back, can’t stay here. I leave the talk & the smoke behind, walk into the clear bell high night, streets & more streets, an all-night store where something happens & I get

stuck for some hours.

There are pieces to it, some of it pain but not all. It wasn't the place I thought it to be, not simple. You had to leave a better way than how you came, that was the rule, as clear & ambiguous both—

“Tell us the rest”

“Rest?”

“Go on. Tell. Now.”

Music, I call you now, from what I know & much the rest, I call you now, music, where you tend I will follow, what you know I will believe. By star's light & dream glow will I map beauty, in songs to manifest, music, I call you now. Each drift on his breeze, one wind, many winds, one rhythm, one melody, many musics, hear my vow.

“Good. Is there more?”

“There's always more. But that's enough for now. Can I go?”

“Going back won't help.”

“I don't want help. Not like that anymore.”

“Like what then?”

“It's one life, one story, one song. It all matters. I've got to work with it all, freely, let it flow back & forth, let it change & change again.”

“Can't be fixed”

“I'm working on but I want a bigger canvas, & to reject none of it. Little as possible.”

“I'm not encouraging you.”

“Just let me through. Open your Gate.”

His face is old with important things come & gone. Days that were worlds & meant everything. Now gone, gone as though never was.

“Tell me one before I go.”

“None matter.”

“Tell me one.”

“Why?”

“I can't get away from you. I'm stuck. So there's something right now I need from you.”

He's not from here, from the United States or the 20th or 21st centuries. He got here through a series of accidents & bad mistakes. His film **RemoteLand** is the most important film ever made yet his life began before motion pictures & he never even read many books.

How here from there? One story was asked for. It's all one story, one life, one song, yes.

There was a discontent that had accompanied his years. Like a low buzz in his heart. He was skilled enough to try working with it, work the buzz into a life, a profession, music some years, painting others, make the buzz visible, audible, so others would share his disturbance over it, trouble too.

One, a painting, dimly lit room, a table, a bowl of eggs, tipping, one falling from the bowl, mid-flight, some looking at this picture said they could *hear* something in it, no explain but one critic mentioned this too, jestful, embarrassed, not one inclined toward either

ordinarily—it caused some trouble, a few less balanced persons to think him endowed with power, wisdom—he did not paint the buzz so bluntly into any successive paintings & soon was being forgotten when he

“I got stupidly mad & I did one more, it was all buzz, I listened to the damned mushrooms one night, their talk of blood paintings, I listened & I painted all night & I delivered these paintings to my dealers in the morning, in a box to his closed gallery & then I left the city far enough so I could not return in time before he saw them. I knew the shit they would raise. It was I guess you might say a dare, a challenge.

“*Don't just disturb them. Infect them! Make it take! Force it to breach the world outside your head, finally, fucking finally!*” Did they tell me that, any of it? I don't know anymore. But I'd done it. I'd painted the buzz on canvas, it was out in the world, & I'd never get it back.”

He never went back to that city & discovered the buzz had changed. The buzz was now his door, to anywhere, to anything. Name a hunger, invent a hunger, now there was food. If not to sate, at least to feed much more fully.

He stops. Stays stopped. Begins to fade back. “Wait. Wait! How did you become the Gate-Keeper? What about **RemoteLand**?”

He shakes his head. “The buzz wasn't mine. Some of it had settled in me when I was young for reasons I still don't understand. It was, I guess you could say, a gift. I didn't understand this until much later. I confused things.”

Stops. Again. Still.

“What?”

“The White Woods is everywhere. The ships have always been overhead. **RemoteLand** has existed forever. You've always been writing *Labyrinthine*.”

“None of that helps.”

“One life, one story, one song.”

Silence. I feel it deepening.

“Is Maya the key?”

“Come again. But go now.”

ii. (cxx.)

“*Sing the hours true & know the hunger is bound in breathing itself, its walls, beams, what girds beneath,*” it's a preacher or something on the radio, Whistler prefers the oldies station but we lost it awhile back, the road is pretty empty of cars & not much human habitation on either side. Bare fields . . . but not woods . . . not yet.

“*Breeze moves each & all, one wind, many, & rains fall with the ceaseless questions & some answers. Want born, roots, thus musics bloom.*”

I don't like preachers. No, I really *hate* them. None where I come from, not like these men. The ships up there, that's where I'm from. Yah, I remembered some, or Whistler helped, or Whistler let me.

The ships. I know that's what they're seen as by those here that see them at all. Ships. And I guess it could be said I came here from there. I'm not from here. But nobody is, really. I'm still a few puzzle pieces sure of a full picture, but I know more than I did. I'm surer.



And I'm surer no preachers where I come from. I make to turn off the radio but a noise from back & I stop. Whistler is changing. Maybe we're getting nearer to the White Woods finally. I still drive but less & less, the car seems to know the way, seems eager.

But that hotel room, the young face with blue eyes, the ships overhead (so-called) . . . I don't know how they relate to each other or to the White Woods. My hours haven't been fracturing so much since the Diner, but I don't feel any more coherent, *whole*.

"Next hill may show whatever the burning smell in the air, or within heart's bluest scent itself, or where bound world's greater arc half risen."

Men know so little & so much, & confuse it all by trying to find for certain their exalted place. Why would the burning smell have to do with men? What arc? What any of it? They take their strengths like language & empathy & twist them into flaws, weaknesses, points for battles *among* them.

Whistler shifts in back again. Whatever he hears of my thoughts I assume all. I assume this temporary body is rife with vulnerabilities. Little chance I could keep any from Whistler, if I wanted to.

"Wanted to?"

"No. I don't. No questions. I just hate this preaching on the radio. So much dust."

"Much dust."

"Yah. But if you like it—"

"Like it."

"OK."

"Sing the hours true, chop wood, carry water, reckon every hour's pulse of promise & ache, what stays, what going."

More on this preacher thing to be said, I don't know if more puzzle pieces or shards or what. Different kinds here, I've learned. Some refer to a book, one or another, often old by men's terms, & try to work the book's words into wisdom, new & fresh wisdom, stories of another day's men & deities tricked into solving a current day's dilemma, hustled toward timeless wisdom.

Others stand in front of their books, would, in fact, toss them away if possible, feel brimming with what is needed, & what needs knowing.

But then, oh then, there are those who pretend toward no knowledge, dispute the possibility of it, dispute any value to be found. Gesture to a mountain or a tree, as though men could find what they need there—

Whistler is now thrashing, I realize he's not able to keep out of my thoughts, I wish I had better.

"I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm driving you. You know my thoughts, you can hear what little imagination I have."

"Don't know why."

"No."

"No."

"You do. You must."

Silence.

The radio continues: *"Ferment & strew, drifting lash on a curved warmth, news of today's annihilation in god's praise."*

Killing for a deity! Killing for land! Killing for a language's domination over another!

“Tell me!”

“Tell?”

“Why?”

“Why.”

“Are we here to help? Will we bring some of them with us? Will we free their planet of them?”

Silence.

“Crack the wish to notice newly, the long remembered page’s lean wisdom, dream’s luring, distant tree line. Every heart blows through empty fields with obscure intent.”

I look back at Whistler, stop fearing for a moment & look, let the car drive us or crash us as it will, look back, he seems no longer the frail thing from my dreams, but I can’t focus. A beast? A great bird? A ragged manuscript.

Speaks, in unison with the radio preacher: *“World manifests in you for its own reasons, many, & none at all.”*

iii. (cxix.)

World evolves an hour to a train’s slow through grassland carrying new dead, to a long waited kiss in rainy light.

her long pause, her lingering pose, her hint of a smile, & eventually the nightie with a teddy bear & something dirty written in numeric code about her belly, & she falls in bed, legs parted, the lights off, the candles, the music, the drift, the dream, *ahh the dream*

the teddy bear moves slowly as she drifts deeper, his paw clumsily pushes up her nightie, the perfect tits, the flat tummy, she moans slightly in resistance but she is too deep, this doesn’t really matter as much, the numeric code, the numeric code

to what purpose, blood & consequence,

something like fear

Music half called, deep hungry words, the teddy pushes her legs apart & gnaws with its dry tongue stuck out from mouthless mouth at her panties, clumsily pushes the panties aside & gnaws, tastes nothing, gnaws & gnaws & tastes nothing still

many books, tenderness & compassion

he leans forward more, dangerously out the window, eyes closed but fluttering wildly, tongue flapping hungrily, tastelessly, *let me in, let me in! let me iN!*

to what purpose (*code*) (*key*) (*sad, endless war*) (*always war, ever war, a war, the war, one war*)
tonguing tastelessly while soft fingerless paws press on perfect tits, press, squeeze, near to seams ripping, pressing, she moans & dreams, *preacher please preacher please preacher please*

good teddy nice teddy hungry
 teddy always hungry teddy eat
 & eat teddy always hungry
 teddy oh teddy always hungry—

To what purpose. Everything goes.

Maya?

Preacher. Maya?

Later teddy is softer, gentles, her dreams calm, Preacher is with her, they walk together by the water, the others are gone for now, he is hers, they walk together, teddy soothes her, soft, deep, kind touch, Preacher talks, tells her truths & secrets just for, just for fucking her, teddy, Preacher, her soft tits, he wants her to look, her pretty low-cut blouse, her tight jeans, walk together, teddy drily parts her thighs & pushes her over, the perfect ass, paws too thick to press in

he moans & leans farther reaches, reaches, for that drawer, what teddy found last time, long, purple, ridged, her deep fear & want the deep purple cock teddy holds it in clumsy unsteady paws presses a little a little more Preacher talks, talks but will soon shout—her pretty blouse, every guy likes it, loves it, wants her, Preacher will too he will—talks near to shouts

Always the same dream as she cums, cums twice, cums countless, always the same as she loses mind & breath to the big fucking dream cum:

Hitlerville. 1922. A tall building at night. Many soldiers. Trying to escape, but trying to get back in, this is the dream, & once in it the rest is nothing, shit-nothing. this is purpose, only, ever purpose.

A stiff uniform, it never softens or settles. Soft grey, none would call it pretty. Considered too long it can sadden an eye, melancholy an hour.

The mission, if a mission, changes or seems to. An ambiguity in it all, & a danger in this ambiguity. A dangerous, slim sense of the unnecessary in all of this. That someone knows, or will find out. That everything can change, that it has before, will again.

And, yes, the dream's dream, no matter how returned here, in the middle of a firefight, rolled up in a muddy ditch, even one of the sex piles that neither inside nor outside would believe the other has too—

the dream—him—Benny—every time—usually in the forest clearing—not always—again the uncertainty in it—but the hunger nonetheless—the great loving raw hunger in being here—in the arrival—

The dream—Benny—his smart mouth & single instruction—

“Find Maya.”

And the other part.

“Kill her.” or “Protect her.” or “Bring her to me.” or something that sounds like “She must fuck the Beast in this clearing & so right everything again.”

Shaven-headed man. A little flabby. Tattoos revealing his weakness for arcane power symbols.

When he approaches the dream ends, he never gets closer than a foot or two. The clearing gets bright, the pale sky & its black stars glow impossibly, there is no animal or bird sound, this becomes disturbing even as there never was a sound—the tree-tops seem aflame or sentient or run along with language, sometimes knowable, often not—Benny does not like this, feels they are competing instructions, another’s directive about Maya, the Beast or what all—

the dream ends & I am fully arrived—the dream perhaps the great hard fucking cum’s aftermath, some kind of brief vision generated by its exhaust—something—

The building is always there—though sometimes not so much a prison. Occasionally a hotel. Once, yes, a school. Full of fascist schoolgirl whores who are trained to fuck the enemies with mined cunts—cunts that will explode upon them cumming—a sort of cumming threshold has to be reaches—used sparingly—

But Hitlerville. 1922. That’s always involved. At least as a movie marquee or a delicatessen.

To get out becomes as much a culture as to get back in. Rarely is there anything else & nobody questions this.

I don’t know why I do.

I tell nobody I question.

Who would I tell?

There is no ongoing narrative here from one time to the next.

Except.

I had to. The fucking wasn’t quite as interesting. Something was happening, there was a somewhere else than here, than this, than dreaming of Benny—

“The fucking wasn’t quite as interesting” is a dangerous thing to have written, even thought. I do not get fucked here. What I do to others, or sometimes they do to me, doesn’t count.

I have an office, sometimes, & I scratched two lines, parallel, fingernail scratches, I left my self embedded, a bit, everything, in that bite.

And next time, I remembered. From then on Hitlerville. 1922. was not my all anymore. I began to leave scratches elsewhere. They echoed. They reminded me. I touched them by programming into myself that I would. That when I cummed very hard, even a bit less interesting, my hand would tremble, would tic a little, reaching, obscurely, but reaching, til a set of scratches found, their bit of me touched, ah, yes. I began to learn. I began to understand.

Ask who isn't trying to get in or out? I could not, aloud, but I began to progress, best I could—

*for the Beast was nearly aware of me. As I showed myself willing to kill or fuck or fuck and kill, or kill & fuck **anything**—as the veils gave way, more doors opened—*

I began to understand that there were no enemies here, no real war. What was cage was the whole thing. No gain for anyone here. Nothing. When dead, dead. Or maybe something else, but not here.

But not here, & not anywhere else.

I grew in my powers, the scratches in walls, on doors, basement corners, they changed things. I was a leader, then I was the Leader.

Then, Teddy came. That is, the Beast came looking enough like Teddy to make me terrified & knew I was caught. Strangely, I wished for Benny as the Beast bounded with the light-footed glee of a two-ton apparition—the moonlight blew away clouds & soldiers around me were dust & gone—Hitlerville. 1922. seemed going too.

“Will you find her?”

“Yes.”

“Say again.”

“Yes.”

I wake & find my nightie clawed from my shoulders & jammed along with my purple vibe deep deep inside me.

The formula is now instructions.

“Fucking cunt,” the soldier swears, loudly, not giving a flying fuck anymore. Bitch didn't get it. He watched her from far, then one time very close, knew she still had his knife marks along her inner thigh from his teeth. That fucking club, she liked it, he'd heard it was a way out, elsewhere, but never knew anyone who'd gone & come back.

The band was good that night. The pills were good. Her dress was short & tight & to the point, & being important she had a booth to see & be seen by all—

So he'd pushed his way under, slowly, fingers touching, fingers pushing a bit when resisted, thighs opening as his head insisted, as he chewed off nylon & panty, maybe more resistance but the blade curled around her kept her mostly still—

“Fucking cunt!” he's holding his guts in now & it's easier to let go to that moment, what he found, let go & not come back—he doesn't, quite, yet—

The band has been jamming for over an hour when the singer takes the mic & sings

**“What to do next
when the wind & the rainbow
& the shutting door?
What to do?”**



Her cunt is bare. Her cunt is tight. Shit, her cunt is cherry! His tongue presses harder in. Her hand clenches his hand clenching the knife against her.

**“Say the world is dis-illusion
call world an effect,
crack that wish
to notice newly?”**

She’s squirming, she’s close, he wants it, wants to blow that cherry cunt out—he tongues deeper & faster, let the knife turn slightly, cut her slightly—

He sings, again, & again:

**“Manifest. Shit is
beautiful too.
Manifest. Shit is
beautiful too.”**

Starts to scream

**“Manifest!
Shit is beautiful too!
MANIFEST
SHIT IS BEAUTIFUL TOO”**

Feels her cumming, a breath & she is burst out, shivering, trembling, crying, yelping—she’s fucking loud but the band is too—he drinks her, sound & cum as the band destroys the stage to cheers—

The soldier wraps his guts in tightly & begins to crawl, he sees her going, & begins to crawl after her, she’s going to meet the Beast, he knows it—he stands, stumbles, falls, gets up, runs a-staggering after her—

He won’t die right now, something is using him, even now, he couldn’t stop pursuing her if he wanted when the something takes control—

Calls them the Eternals, there’s more than one, sometimes they let him act on his own—but—like that night, he wanted to rise up & stab her, stab her over & over while she was still cumming, while her cherry was still bloody, still wet with his spittle—before the cherry came back—he learned later—

The Eternals won’t let him kill her then, won’t let him die now—

While she lives, he has purpose, to protect her—at the cost of his life—at the cost of his heart—at the cost of everything—being a soldier, a bad one, won’t free him, getting shot neither—

he follows, bleeding, alive—

iv. (cxvii.)

Leaves everywhere shake &
 I understand:
I know nothing.
 Trees above drink of earth & shine alike:
I am nobody.

This is what it was like, wasn't it, Preacher?

Human paths through hills & bushes decaying
 the moment the pick draws away—

You're not with me this time, & I came back with my own intent, a wish, a request.

But I'm losing within, Preacher, I understand: *I know nothing.* Earth & shine: *I am nobody.*

Losing within this hour, any hour, all hours, the sadness, the struggle to share, losing within,
 this hour is a gift, every hour, all hours a gift—no hours—there are no hours—

Think! Think! There is a way, a ledge, keep some, keep what's needed:

what? Preacher answers in my mind:
 "hunger." He pauses, refines: "discontent."

I will a ledge below me, beneath my mushroom body, no appendages, no roots, will this ledge
 & stand shakily on it.

Discontent. Shape it. Begin where? Christa? No. More ease in my feelings toward her than I
 realized. Gretta? No. And, strangely, peace in glancing toward her.

My father, where else, I fall in & begin to gather my materials, I find there's not a lot I
 haven't used, picked away from discontent to resignation. Near, nearer the one I'd saved. What
 he said to me, a boy still, before disappearing.

I was a boy but also not quite. He must have seen he was leaving me on the cusp. Must
 have felt the questions I would ask before I had them formed & worked up the courage to ask.

I think he knew. I was that damned egg, to put it bluntly, falling off the table.

He could catch, retrieve to that spot. He could catch & ease the way down, point out
 what to see down here, offer his advice in lieu of answers no man has to give.

He could just let me fall & spend a lifetime trying to recover.

Which? Did you try to cut the difference with what you said? It wasn't advice on how
 to get in the tight pink panties of the elusive smiling schoolgirls in my class. Wasn't how to
 survive with something within in tact, worth defending, when the years would crowd bastards

& demons closer & closer.

No, nothing for my roaring need to grab ass nor the hard fucking path I was being brainwashed into walking, into believing what it was to be human in this walking.

You talked to me. I know now you'd already been a fucking mushroom. I know now you saw too much of what I was bound for.

But what you told me, me, with my half-grown rock-hard schoolboy cock & puppy tender heart, what you told me:

Stars on that porch wave too bright that night, it's like the ships ever constant overhead were leaning down & especially listening to what you said.

“What answer is a tapping in our cells, a deep rhythm, a source of knowing & nothing, move nearer, no why, move on, sing, trust.”

Was it the first girl I seduced who I sang those words to as I slowly stripped, somewhere between the “please don't” & “I'm a virgin” & the “will you show me how to please you?”—those words, her candied breathing as ever inch, every moment, she revealed herself brand new to us both, the carefully chosen colors & layers falling away, the sweaty lightly tanned skin, the breasts she worries are a little heavy, worries I don't look at enough, the hips she's played others with, ride a little, retreat a little, ride a little wilder, & retreat, this time, baby, just this time, oh yes Dad tell me more I'll use it on this one & the next few

“What answer” stir of ice in his square blue bourbon glass “in godless hands that can shape dust to bullet & back again, thus back again, or shape dust to a prayer of thanks, manifest a star in every seeking eye.”

She bucks at the word “prayer,” reaches to clutch panties I'd chewed from her an hour ago, she's a church going girl or used to be, what would Preacher say, she'd thought she'd be his first, it was one look, one deep deep look, Bowie's tongue recalls her back & a harder tap & thrust deeper flings her on, “say fuck me, Preacher” she thinks she hears though how when his mouth is deep inside her *oh god ohgodohgodohgodfuckmepreacherfuckmepreacher*, **FUCK ME PREACHER** but he pulls back a little, relaxes, she takes a breath & gulps more, wondering why he pulled back a little, feels him moving up her body, kissing here & there, keeping her thighs very wide *oh god please*, feels him atop her looks down her length to see his hard prick entering her in a single long stroke she starts to scream when a single finger on her lips stops her & as he thrusts again, slower, each time deeper he says in her ear, watching her eyes, teaching her the rhythms to help her fuck back, she follows him then clicks in, a slight shift down there & their power is one, no longer a one fucking the other, now a single thing, a fuck, a good hard fuck, there are words, his voice deeper than the boy's a few hours ago, the one who had brought her here because of his nerdy charm, his pant when talking to her, the way her smart friend noticed him noticing her, that thrill of power now a millionfold, a lunacy of pleasure as he said, “leaves are shaking harder now, everywhere, a language of both knowing & nothing, a pickless path, this hour's gift both spent & unspending” she cums blindly & wants to howl but, again, the

single finger, the softly spoken words: “Move nearer the deep rhythm, sing, trust, move on” her cumming echoes upon itself, explosions clawing to rip her apart, alive & she whimpers with him as he says & she says with him “No why & there never was No why & there never was No Why AND there Never WAS N W A T N W Nowhyandthereneverwas slowly now again softly that’s good cum slowly for me slowly nearer nearer ride me ride me not yet NOW! NOW! NOW! NOW! *No why & there never was*

No why & there never was. No

why & there never was

No why.

Never was.

No. Never.

Her last glimpse before passing out is a beautiful freeing vision of her friend, on her knees, this boy riding her ass very hard, her mouth gagged, her hands tied behind her, riding, riding, riding, oh yes, soon, yes, very soon.

The ledge is now solid. The wish can be made.

v. (cxviii.)

Fear falls frozen dripping through the heart, one & many wonder at its breathless wall, its lump of god within.

Jazz stands in the middle of the square, wrapped in her blue scarf, watching, for a little while, a woman dressed like a bride standing atop a box, nearly motionless, face powdered white & lips painted bloody. People gather, stare, watch her poses. Add coins to her ornate box.

“Get off.”

“I said: Get off!”

“Hey! What the fuck!”

“Get off the box. I need it.”

“Fuck you!”

“Once I unwind this scarf, nobody will look at you anyway.”

“Fuck! No. This is my hour here. You can go after.”

Rather than argue, Jazz simply begins to unwind the scarf which is all covering her body. The bride is forgotten in this new spectacle. Some look. Some avoid looking.

“Hey, be careful, little girl. Someone will call the cops!”

“Or *Playboy!*”

Several older women rush from the growing crowd to cover her.

“Leave me be.”

“Are you crazy, miss! What are you doing? Are you on something?”

Jazz stares them down. “Let them look. Let them listen.”

They pause. A statement from a nude girl?

She looks at them, poses as previously instructed, her hands a gentle shelf for her perfect young breasts, her back arched. Lips licked, but to speak.

“Fear . . . falls . . . dripping through the heart” she begins.

“Something else is dripping on you, little girl” someone shouts to cheers & hisses.

She holds her position. “How alone & why?”

The whistles & hoots increase.

“Ancient astronauts taught us this far & left, nodded, let go?”

“Hey, baby, I won’t let go, I promise!”

“Yah!”

“Ride that nice thing all night long! Come to the Lizard King, honey! I can do anything!”

They won’t listen, Master. My body is plainly bared. There is nothing to wonder about. I’m speaking your words.

She nods, kneels among the tresses of her body scarf. “I will take the first.”

The crowd freezes.

“I will perform & then speak. Every one of you.”

Nobody moves. Nobody speaks.

She is kneeling, legs apart, a position of worship & supplication. Two police approach.

“OK, honey. It’s OK. How old are you? Are you high?”

Something happens & she is gone.

“Why did you bring me back?”

“Jasmine, this isn’t the way.”

“Am I in the White Woods? Is she alive? No more of this hustling on my body!”

“What else of you?”

“I learned, Master! I listened. You let me go. Sent me to the others.”

“Yes.”

“Tell me!”

“Why do you pose?”

“It’s what everyone wants! Pose or fuck.”

“What else is there?”

“I don’t know. Nobody cares what else.”

“How did you end up here?”

“My sister. She was taken. I was too.”

“What happened?”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember. But the doctor after said I wasn’t . . . hurt.”

“Fucked.”

“No. I wasn’t.”

“And your sister?”

“I don’t know.”

“Jazz, what is her name?”

“Name?”

“Yes.”

“Um. Ashleigh?”

“Is that a question?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you have a sister?”



“Yes! I saw. They . . .”

“They what?”

“They tied me up in front of a camera, pretended to do things to me. They told me if I didn’t cooperate, my sister would get very hurt.”

“Now you’re wondering about this.”

“They didn’t do it. They pretended to do it. They told me to struggle & moan but only a little.”

“You said you didn’t remember.”

“I don’t know what happened after. How I got home. Where Ashleigh is.”

“Is that her name?”

“Yes.”

“You think so.”

“Yes.”

“So you came back for her.”

“Yes.”

“To the White Woods.”

“Yes.”

“Is she here?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why are you back here, Jasmine?”

“I. Master?”

“I am not your Master.”

“Please.”

“Tell me.”

“I don’t know.”

For a flash: her hair is down, she is facing a bareheaded black man, face to face, legs entwined, he is pushing an enormous cock inside her & she rides it out of desperation not to get hurt, her heels press down hard on black stiletto heels each time he thrusts, his face buries in her chest, sucking & biting each nipple til she howls as his bites & thrusts burn & break & dissolve her, the sunlight through the great windowpane, the ocean at great high tide in view, he bites & thrusts & she—

Again: a hotel room, maybe a ballroom, endless long, a mirrored monstrosity, many chandeliers, dripping . . . honey? blood? cum? Crowded with men & women & beasts & aliens, they give way to her, defer, as she approaches, a stage, a microphone—speaks—the Master’s words again but some of her own:

“Fear falls frozen dripping through the heart, one & many wonder at its breathless wall, its lump of god within. How alone & why? Ask again. The cicadas & bamboo too? Ancient astronauts taught us this far & left, nodded, let go?”

The ballroom pulsates, alternates with another scene. She is watching her sister being fucked by a . . . something. Sister on her stomach, legs spread wide, the Beast is on top of her, his hands crushing her breasts, his twin cocks fucking her cock & ass, how, *o god o fuck*

moan Jazzy moan like I taught

no it's Ashleigh I watched

moan Jazzy moan goodgood

it fades & she continues speaking:

“Want, taught to want, to feed one hunger with another, to choose, to almost know, hurry toward those brilliant years, sensuous playing lights.”

No. I remember her. I remember the night we were taken. I remember how she let them—so they wouldn't. I couldn't get her out. This is a fucking trick!

The Master nods. “The White Woods is all tricks. You can't navigate it alone. You won't survive.”

“I only have you.”

She strokes his cock, lightly, in their bed, beneath the glowing ocean skies, never able to see all of him at once, without thinking lifts up & makes to mount him, mount the much wider hips, longer legs, the cock her cherry tight pooch—

He pushes her lightly but she clings.

“I only have you.”

A moment balanced, feeling him about to enter her, then a noise, behind her, a bang, a shot, a single word: “No.”

Jazz is in her bedroom, the old one, before they moved, when she still had Ashleigh, standing over her, looking at the chat underway on her computer.

“He's asking if you're a virgin.”

Jazz inwardly shakes. Thinks. Remembers.

“I tell them something that happened. Something I laugh & blush about.”

She types & types. A tale about sitting in a man's pickup truck, letting him look at her, down there, not *touch*, just look, & he buys her a music player. Ashleigh laughs & laugh. Says something about the fountain at the mall. Makes to leave but Jazz says no.

“What's wrong, Jazz-ma-tazz? You're doing better cock-teasing than I ever did.”

“Ash, something.”

“What? I have to get going before they get home.”

“They took us tonight, Ash.”

“Who?”

She thinks. Is this the White Woods? Has the Master sent her back? Is she dreaming?

She shuts off the computer. Roughly.

“Jazz! Come on! I know you hate her, but that cost her a lot of money.”

Jazz grabs her sister's hand. Drags her through the house, to the living room whose windows look out to the street.

They hunch low, lights off, peek through the curtains.

“Look. The van.”

“Yes, Jazz. It's a van.”

“It’s the one that took us tonight.”

“Took us? We’re sitting here at home, in the dark. Not taken.”

“They came in, took us both. I escaped when it burned down.”

“What?”

“The White Woods.”

“White . . . Woods?”

“You didn’t. Get out. I couldn’t find you. I tried.”

“Jazzy.”

“But they didn’t burn down. They can’t. So I came back to get you.”

“Jazzy.”

“I found a way in. I had to do things. There’s a hotel. I lied. But I got in.”

“Jasmine!”

She slaps Ashleigh’s face hard. “I don’t know if we’re still there or if the Master sent me back to tonight to save us.”

“Master.”

“Am I supposed to go again? Let myself be taken, knowing what I do?”

Ashleigh yanks free & stands. The door bursts open. But it’s those college boys she’s been sneaking out to see. They have beer & weed. One hunkers up around Ashleigh to hug her & one hand cups her ass tightly, the other squeezes her tit possessively.

Something is different. The music is loud. More arrive. Ashleigh is making out hard with one of them. He turns away every so often & looks over to Jazz, says a word.

“Come on, Ash.”

“She’s my little sister.”

“Doesn’t look so small.”

“Aren’t I enough, you pig.”

“Feel down there, Ash. Good, now stroke.”

“Um. Mm.”

“Nice? Yes?”

“Yes.”

“Say it.”

“Nice.”

“Want it inside you?”

“Yes.”

“Then we bring baby sister in on it. Someone’s going to have her tonight. With you & me it will be gently. We’ll have fun.”

“No.”

“One of these others might just be a little rough. They’re waiting on me. On you. She belongs to me unless you cut her loose.”

“No.”

Jazz is on the couch now. “It’s OK, Ash.”

“No!”

“Let’s go in the bedroom so we don’t put on a show!”

Ashleigh is half-dragged in, he’s licking his lips over her, she’s letting her tank top straps fall from her shoulders, letting him get a good look.

He carries Ash with him into bed. Jazz dims the lights. Knows he really wants to fuck

her while Ash watches.

Lets a few things happen, lets him strip her some, maul her a little.

Starts to talk, in his ear, then louder, something happens he does not expect, it hurts, it hurts more. She talks:

“Hunger, is it more complex with more men, larger cities? Does any who falls tonight triumph in finale, glory for not an hour more?”

He starts to scream, when he feels his cock being ripped from his body & somehow weaker than this much smaller girl.

She chants, as the Master taught her:

“Fear falls, frozen, dripping through the heart, great galleries & long centuries, preachers roar & kings thump.” She lets go a little, just a touch. Continues: *“Comfort in hovering together close over the abyss, align gazes & call it love, or gesture to maps & libraries, bullets, chalice, scripture, grave, solemn, nod their truth?”* She lets go a little more, whispers: *“Comfort in what hasn’t slipped yet & touchless faith it will hold.”* She squeezes him until he screams, then pushes him lightly off the bed.

Ashleigh is staring at her. They are in their parents’ bedroom, his choice.

“Are you listening to me now, Ashleigh?”

“Yes,” she whispers.

“Walk out there with this phone in your hand, tell them you’ve dialed 9 and 1, and if you dial another 1, all of them are going to prison for rape. Do it now.”

Ash nods. Jazz hears her voice, hears her repeat more clearly, hears hurried, noisy departure, cars starting up & leaving.

Her boyfriend, whatever he is, is moaning on the floor.

Speaking very softly, she says: “I didn’t rip out your balls & let you bleed to death for a reason. Not that you’re fucking her, if you even have yet. I know she’s still a virgin but lets stories tell lies.”

A moan. But listening.

“I know how to hurt you worse than killing you. You know I’m not afraid. I know you are.”

Now just breathing.

“I need someone. You. You’re going to help me.”

Nothing.

“Nod!”

A movement.

“Say yes!”

“Yes” croaked.

“Again!”

“Yes!”

“There will be a reward if you do right.”

Ashleigh walks in, barely.

“He’s going to help me.”

“Help?”

“The White Woods isn’t just a place. You don’t escape it by walking out.”

Ashleigh stares.

“We’re still in it. The Master didn’t send me back in time to stop it. He did bring me to you. We’re in the White Woods, *do you understand this?*”

She nods dumbly. She doesn’t know anything.

“He’s going to help us. For a reward.”

“Reward.”

“Yah. Later on that.”

The Master’s cum that last night had tasted like moonlight, like sugar, like new breathing. As always, in their coupling, he talked. He talked and she listened, it was like he was wind & she chimes.

“Questions mirror glance to glance, & highest music only sighs & sings of full moons, midnight tides, & the moment’s power in warmth laying by warmth.”

She felt herself cumming, very hard, & longed as never for any other, that he enter her, stay inside her, she tried to suspend it aloft, as he’d taught, use the energy to fly, the ocean so near, the moon as full as his words that night.

“Tonight behold the wide world with all its fears, howling & half-awake, no key to explain”

They had howled, together, that night:

“Behold the world, howling, half waking, yet still no key to the smallest face or least star”

She looks at the man, whatever he is. At Ashleigh, sweaty & badly shaken. “There is no Master anymore. This is his gift to me. This is his goodbye.”

vi. (cxvi. + cxv.)

Years ago I sat here, jobless & alone. Not a long time ago I sat here jobbed & loved. Now I sit here jobless & loved. This strange, shifting equation. I’m lost in this, call it a sea or mist, & solid ground comes & goes. A labyrinth. Labyrinthine. Life as fixtion. Fixtion as life. The despair that perhaps makes good Art in life tries to drown a little more every day. The push back, the vow, the promise, the wordless wish.

What then, what? A book I keep from commerce’s claws by sinking the rest of me in, willingly. Toward hours at these pages, toward every new & old thing I can throw into them, this open-ended book I see no solid conclusion to, no plan.

What then? I press the Universe: let me, help me to find work to protect who & what I love. I vow, I wish, I promise.

There are moments leading to that happy one of victory, moments when I am not in



my familiar mind as I beg pretty, cajole pretty, all but willing suck shit from this one or that one's asshole. I would. At hardly a remove, I do. I do, & again, & again.

And so helpless to the power of others, mostly unknown. A child in this helplessness, cursing its unfairness, & the poverty of imagination I see. Cursing my own as despair laps its brown waters at me from many sides.

Yet here I sit, live, able, this poor folks cafeteria where I've been atop the barrel at sea & below. Not safe, but not, perhaps, as much danger as some years.

Universe, I ask, I beg, I wish. Please help me on this course. Please help me. I remember my father telling me he'd pray to his mother in hard times. I pray to you now, whatever you are beyond a stone & a box of bones 3,000 miles from here. Whatever you were. Help me. My story, this book, is raw & vulnerable in this asking, yet I ask. Help me to succeed & soon in this task. To find good work as I had before taken away by accountants, more loyal work.

I have asked in all my notebooks & I ask here, in these pages, expose here this need, promise, beg, wish.

Help me.

My gift is to pass to this book's people what I was given: ask the Universe, ask those loved & lost. Ask. Ask & ask. And be grateful in this struggle.

The man in the wheelchair, a long beard & crazy look, & a second empty wheelchair tied to his, says: "Come on, let's go back."

"Who are you?"

"You met me in recent dreams."

"Who *are* you?"

"I want to lead you back in."

"Am I out?"

"It's this way."

"Is this out?"

Hesitates. "It's the shallows."

"What if I go the other way. Is there shore? Is there land?"

He motions. "Get in."

"I don't know."

"You asked for help. You wish. Promise. Beg."

"Yes."

"Get in. Let's go."

I get in the empty seat & we push, off-synch at first, then better. A night coalesces around us. City neon, short skirts, slow & pressing traffic. The laughter of booze & want.

"There's more."

"Yah."

"You don't believe me?"

"It doesn't matter."

People let us by, few look at our faces. "Why give away that or anything?"

"What do you want of them?"

"Listen, some talk about the masses as one but I don't see it. I see half-awake animals

jostling for bones, coins, & dirt. Calls for unity sum to shit. Good to cheer for in a faceless crowd. I don't see it manifest."

"What do you want of them?"

"Behavior more mature than children. Better than selfish & short-sighted. Maybe just some honesty."

"Do you do better?"

"I try. I fail but I try. I look at faces I encounter. It's not much."

"Maybe none of this is what would work best."

"What then?"

"Finding a sense of place & contentment there."

"Maybe."

"The world will press on when you are dust & blow away."

"I know."

"Then what you have is your unknown stretch, your choices, & the vagaries of luck."

I nod.

"Look. Look!"

A white bunny rabbit about 5 feet tall hops up. To me, gazing me steady. I gaze back a moment.

It turns & hops away, slowly, as though I will follow.

I stand, don't follow.

"Why not?"

"I'm going into the shallows, that's what I need, what I'm after."

The man nods. "I'll wait." I noticed the bunny rabbit has paused too.

The city clarifies & becomes familiar, my current neighborhood, my recent hours. I walk toward one of several writing joints, not to fear, not to turn away.

A table I've sat at many times, the cup of soda, the window's view of a car wash across the street, its sign a digital one, time & temptation—

The table next to mine sits a scrawny old black woman, at her puzzles with a short pencil—

I wonder what they are & have never asked. An old man with a coffee pauses friendly near her. Some mumbled words.

"The college could probably use you in their anthropology department," he concludes, smiling back to his own table.

People come & go, a variety, some faces sheen & plush, some worn hard, alert for the lash. I look for the connecting thread, the blood shared among them, below the lies of race, ideology, ethnicity, sex, inherited senses of alliance, the child's mind washed with prejudice & discontent. Come & go, no explanation here.

Universe, & Dad, this page is a cry in a weaker hour, a plea, a wish. I feel partway there, somewhere, a portion of what I can be, a twist of hungers that spits song some hours & others wastes all.

This hour I ask for a soon coming hour's success. I ask to do better when the path is clear, &

less despair when it isn't.

I opened these pages to this prayer because whatever another's rules for story, for book, I have no interest. This prayer is this hour's matter, manifest it in song or otherwise. I acknowledge this life's burdens & expectations while expecting I live far more than meeting them. I expect more, Universe, & Dad, & right now I hobble. Hobble with a stubborn gait but hobble nonetheless. Please help me toward this wished success, & thank you, my loves, thank you dearly & deeply.

We sit at our tables, one between us, she at her puzzles or whatever they may be, her pencil, my black pen, not a word between us yet, though I think she sneezed earlier & I called "Bless you" by youth's habit—

Workmen in a corner install an espresso machine, one scolds the others to tape off their work area properly & fill in any holes they make—

Another corner has a machine that rents films on disk for a dollar a day—what is any of this? The shallows, the shore?

She wears an apricot-colored shirt & purple slacks, black knit cap & woolen coat, limps, badly, over to the trash can to dispose her cup. Our eyes meet but hers register nothing. Passes me by, going now, little hand purse, beat brown shopping bag, again looks at me, again . . . nothing—

I sat here hours tonight reading through a poet's work, half century of poems—culling what I needed, for a small chapbook—

what? what?

The beg, the wish, the plea—I could not be more focused on this—

My naked, raw, please.

If it was some other book I would not be checking in with this jobhunting news, yet here it is & I am—

It may happen tomorrow morning, the catch into new employment, end to a month's nightmare, maybe I'll retreat from these shallows then—

A new page will tell.

The new page says: not yet. It says: strike on. It says: beaten or beat on. It says: not yet but soon. It says: wanting leads toward getting, wanting more toward getting even closer. It says: you have not given all, really given all, you have given some but maybe held back a little, not believing that even the answer will be more than passage, will not be arrival.

Ask: do I still wish for arrival?

Ask: what would it look like?

Ask: what would it give, & demand?

Ask: do I believe arrival is possible?

Ask: have I earned it, or just luck its getting?

Answer: I wish for safety in the danger & mystery

Answer: It would look like hard work & freedom.

Answer: It would demand my best & reward me in kind.

Answer: Possible, but I'm uncertain.

Answer: No answer.

Ask, finally: does it matter? Death engulfs all, & whatever after. *Does it matter?*

Answer: A thousand confused words or, simply, yes. It matters. I don't know why, don't know what this all is, but I cannot refute it by sum, as I don't know its whole, nor in parts, as I cannot see how each contributes to that whole. It matters & I don't know why.

I feel these truths, these fears, most clearly & profoundly at night. Day comes & I don't know in a helpless, blindly, wildly terrified way. That is my struggle. Not music, art, the singing I do or enjoy in others. It's daylight's insanity. Its fake sobriety, false rationalism, lunatic arguments pretended as truths.

Those hours my worst, my brutal struggle—

What, then, the morrow? I keep thinking that it's war. That I cannot succeed with honor & virtue, but trickery & hustle, that I need to take by whatever means & be less generous than I would wish to be against dangers I cannot foresee—

Daylight divides soul from soul, it is a place of false words, not music but talk, lies created to explain or battle other lies. Sides taken as though it is the world, not men, that create borders among them. Distinctions found in a color, a genital, an accent, an idea of faith.

How to engage such? Without loyalty or faith. With mask & costume.

With an idea firm that one far day's success will be most of daylight's hours spent in dreams of coming night.

Daylight I beat at it, ranted at it, begged a little, a little more, & dug into my task—what this book now but become a diary of fragments—where Maya? where the Golden Eagle? where the wide & swallowing White Woods? Where the Beast?

The Beast is here, is now, is tonight. The Beast clouds stars & sun alike, heart's hopes, many kind impulses of stranger toward stranger—

Maya waits, pends, like the others
but the Beast does not.

“Aww, man, you need a drink, brother.”

“No. I need a job.”

“Yah, that too. But a drink couldn’t hurt in the meantime.”

“No. A job.”

“Yah. You really gave it up, huh.”

“Moved on. It happens.”

“Well, anyway, don’t give up. You’ll find it, do what you gotta do.”

“Can’t say how fucking tough it is.”

“Hey, it’s on the TV. People all over are hurting. Maybe it will get better when we get those old bastards out & something better in.”

“I hope so.”

“Can’t hurt to try something new when the old ain’t working.”

“Yah.”

“Gotta try.”

“Job. Need job.”

“You’ll do it, buddy. Hang tough. Be stubborn. Hell, say a prayer.”

“I did.”

“Say another. Maybe nobody heard the other.”

OK. My new prayer. Universe, Dad, I need a job & I wish one very soon. I am hurting now worse than my wallet. I need to find my way back to the wheel & I need your help. Please help me to get a *good job and soon*. Please. Please. Thank you.

I read: “Old thoughts crowd the peak, obscure both sky & valley,” & these were words written only some weeks ago, but a kind of forever. I was tired that day but felt I was striding OK, the times hard but I was grateful, I was working—

I read: “The years conspire to narrow faith, harden & systemize what it becomes. Worshipped words without burn,” & it occurs to me now how there is little time for fine thought, or tries toward it, when one’s purse or person or loved ones are in danger. I am no thinker now as I was in those hours writing those lines. I am a desperado, a man-shaped fear, a well-spoken beggar for what I need. Faith now is subsumed to hustle, to lie & whore for it, & *fucking get it*.

I read: “How long stable this living machine? Look to how dear men bear the crumble of other centuries, & yet little reck its warning,” & nothing occurs to me but the lunatic obsession my world has with sexual prurience—with controlling the use & produce of cunt—& so little care for health, for teaching its young a knowledge of body & mortality—to live & die never having understood one’s own limbs, lungs, genitals, blood heart.

I read: “Old thoughts, on a familiar train crossing a local river, some factory crowds its edge,” & remember to the moment, two, one of witness, one of composition, the first a train, near the last time I would take it for that reason, the second a dimly lighted room in a museum, sitting, calming, the day’s toil done, did not know then what it summed to & do not know now.

Hope hungers me, it is night.



It is night, hope hungers me.

[Maya reads: “I witness this passing hour in nod to its sky, its valley, what treasure it keeps, what it passes along.” Her book without the cover, without the title page, no footers on its other pages to tell who wrote this book or what its title. She hasn’t read it in awhile, was reminded of it by Samantha, who wasn’t around awhile.

[“Back to basics, Maya.”]

I sit back in the wheelchair. The long-haired man smiles when I ask about death. Brightly cries while he claps: “Rocket, boom! A better world.” The tall bunny rabbit looks at me as though to ask if I am ready. I nod, & we push our wheelchair conveyance smoothly behind him as he hops forth, from the shore, the shallows, back deeper, where I’ve denied myself a few days, maybe necessary, maybe so——

What now, Maya? What now, Bowie? I look toward you with this query, wondering any way to give you something I don’t have, something I can’t know——

What would that be?

“They’re not there to free, they’re there for you to work with, respect, run with”

“Like friends”

“Like always”

“This isn’t my best self tonight, these days. It’s some version of me, something. But not my best.”

“Been worse.”

“Now a new week come.”

“Bring this in. Bring it all in.

Breach the fucking daylight
with your Art. Do it.”

We roll in deeper together.

vii. (cxiv.)

Damned unsure yet keep moving—it seems I can’t hold or reck true much more than this—I want to—I want to—I so want to——

Hardly any words but
vow’s true by this hour’s acts——

I want to call for faith, for more than these few words—
yet, no,

vow's true by this hour's acts.

Strange it was when Sunday night & *TripTown* came on at 9 like it used to, & the drinkers at Luna T's Cafe's bar settled into it agreeably & then a scene where a man on the TV screen walked into Luna T's Cafe's bar as those in the actual bar watched a similar man walk through the door into their midst—

The two were similar not the same but did tell the same story in tandem it seemed as the drinkers turned from TV to man among them to take in the tale—

“When I was a dragon many years ago I lived in a cave in the hills above a small village. I had been left there when I was small & I'd grown up all alone—

“The village's people were afraid of me & there were rumors I had incinerated children with my flaming breath, & would do it again & worse if not kept at bay by sentinels on watch day & night on the edge of the town.

“It was a lonely existence & maybe I would have lived & died that way save for a chance finding in my cave. It was a pile of books. I got excited by the sight of them, though, & my fiery breath torched them all—

“Save for the one volume not with the rest when my breath went off—

“I'd been sad several days when I discovered this book tucked partially away in a narrow crevice—

“I didn't know what it was save that it was made by men, like the ones who drove me from town & guarded against me.

“I'm not sure how I discovered it was a book much less the skills to read it, but I tend to think that whoever my parents were, they were wise & wily. So I learned. I read, & I learned more.

“Then came the day when I came down from the hills into the village, determined to change how things were. I'd decided to risk myself in this hope.

“The sentinels let me pass but gave signal I was on the move in town. Women, children, the old & sick were all hid away safely.

“I'd come so close because I wanted to be chased & followed.

“I made sure most of the men folk in town were coming after me, & I led them a long chase through the woods to a clearing.

“There I made my stand. With them shouting threats of all kinds, & spears at my tough skin, I did nothing.

“Then I let out a bellow & stood them back several paces, & at that moment I scorched the earth with a message:

**“I MEAN YOU NO HARM
LET US MAKE PEACE.”**

Now nobody saw it because nobody expected a dragon to scorch earth with language.

“What I did to force my point was blow fire up in the air until a huge black cloud of smoke blotted the daylight—

“Then also with my flame I gently illuminated for them the message on the ground.

“One, a man I later knew as Specs, saw the message & compelled his townfolk to stop threatening me & stop being afraid—

“He knew in fact from my message I had read a book, read one of his books for it was he who had lived in the cave before me.

“He was called Specs, short for Spectacles, & he’d run the town newspaper awhile. But he did not hale from the town; neither did they know of his time living in the cave.

“What they did regard him was with trust. They stopped attacking & awaited what next.

“One of us is a ghost. We each carry a small vial on a necklace. The ghost carries the ashes of our deceased body. The other carries desert sand. The answer to this riddle isn’t as plain to solve as it may seem.”

“My name is Preacher. I’ve come here to find my old partner.”

The drinkers at Luna T’s look at the TV & then each other trying to figure out which puzzle to work first—

“Are we part of that TV show now?”

“Nah, it’s some trick. Barkeep, where’s the hidden camera?”

Mr. Bob leans on the counter & shakes his head.

The drinkers look at the TV where the drinkers look back at them & both regard the Preacher, though each has the one sitting near—

“How can he be dead or alive & on TV at the same time?”

“It’s a trick. One of them *Candid Camera* or reality shows. Cmon, barkeep! What’s the joke?”

He shakes his head again. “This one’s for you to deal with, boys.”

I sit in the corner watching this all play out, writing it down, causing it or reporting it hard to say, this deep in I’m not sure it matters, perhaps it does—

Sit thinking my own tangled thoughts, interrupting this promising scene to mind them better—thinking how this book no longer has a center or a focus, I’ve discarded goal or length of any kind, discarded the idea that distinct stories matter other than for commerce’s purposes—

Yet—

“Are you abandoning this scene? This is getting weird enough to get good”

There is a music I do adhere to even now, a deep rhythm, a long melody, a shaped wish & a pursuit that matters—

“We’re losing him”

“Eh, he’ll be back. We’re what he has left of other days.”

“Better ones?”

“Just different. But he keeps them & he keeps us too.”

Turn back to the old, ongoing sheaf of songs & read: “Brave, bastardly brave, stupidly brave, happily brave, let the countless musics within bloom.” What are the pages for? Maybe not anything pointed. Maybe just because. Maybe because I was small & poor & paper & pens & books were what I had, & what I have now still. But what of this endless story? Have I abandoned any idea of form, of coherent structure?

Let the countless musics within bloom. Sitting here in a poor folks cafeteria, another one, sitting here & listening to music & I have no answer yet—let the countless musics bloom—what of this? Bravery when fear tries to swallow & bury?

Read on: “Break narrow faith & dreams of burning landscapes, win or lose by what matters, struggle to share, & share.” Win or lose by what matters. What matters? I ask, knowing & not knowing.

There is a music I adhere to even now, a deep rhythm, a long melody, a shaped wish & a pursuit that matters—knowing & not knowing.

Read: “Blowing scarce tonight, I pledge to my returning tide, & what fineness still waits.” Blowing scarce, what fineness waits. Both, regard this heart. Blowing scarce, waiting fineness.

Nothing goes away, nothing returns, I keep not knowing what this is, what far depths it can go, what to do with this

I can only think: this curtained savagery is beyond any easy knowing, or hard or long or any knowing—

Nothing goes away, nothing returns, this curtained savagery, did you know that, Père? Did you see it in your lion’s years or later? Did you see it when your brain was going & gone, could you have told me that last time I phoned you in your hospital bed, when instead you ranted to me that all was hatred & all were enemies?

What could you have said to me that last night, last time we spoke, what help, what advice, what warning? If not that, what comfort now if ye exist more than decaying bones in a box? What do you know now if anything more or at all?

Nearly 800 pages & I’ve got no answers, nothing goes away, nothing returns, this curtained savagery, listen:

for awhile she is told to walk around, just like that, a kind of small arena dim in roseate light, she is barefoot but the ground below is soft, almost like grass, told to walk around, she is not nude but no longer strange to how much or little she is made to wear—there are moments when she is lucid enough to think she is drugged, to wonder how much of this is real, how much is happening, what else might be happening she cannot remember, her name is gone,

much of what were her memories, this no longer frightens her, never did really, how could it? This is what she knows, how she pleases, perhaps it will change soon, perhaps she has been told so, perhaps she wishes she could keep walking around the small roseate-colored arena forever, bending & posing & singing as she is told—

Nothing goes away, nothing returns, look!

I am near you now, Maya, I travel by your scent, by how I remember it by those hours when I carried you in my arms, I am nearing you, Maya & I find the needs to eat & sleep are gone, & memories too, are gone, all is roseate like your skin, all is soft & murmurs, all needs me to come to you & the consuming hour,

(curtained savagery, nothing goes away, nothing returns)

& the dreams bother me less because I am used to them, they come while I near you, not eating, not sleeping, not wishing for them or inviting them, yet they come & bother me less

sometimes things have gone wrong & there are bars, once there was another woman, Maya, I explained it to her & she understood, the dreams bother me less, she was a dream, Maya, the bars were a dream, I am nearing you, your scent, those hours, near—

vow true, vow something, keep moving, is that what you would have said, Père? What did you know to tell, what did you know I will not ever learn, what was all that now summed to your life, to what you completely, & no longer, are?

What? Can you tell me now? Can I dream you yet? Do you exist outside that box in the earth? Is there something still? Is there something more? Me & my books, do I know as well as you do & did, me & my musics, me & my trees, me & my still-breathing lungs, still-beating heart? What do I know, what do I lack? Why can nobody tell me wherefrom or whereto yet so many will point to a book or a man or a temple & say, yonder find why—

No. I refuse. I refuse at this hour to believe any know the why or the next. I refuse it all. I don't know what remains after that, a remain called Art which helps & salves me in my suffering, or at least sets it to a soft tune—Look! Look!

“I don't know where I am anymore in this.”

“I can't say I do either.”

“Is this what you want, how it's going to be?”

“I don't know. Maybe not.”

“Tell me something sure.”

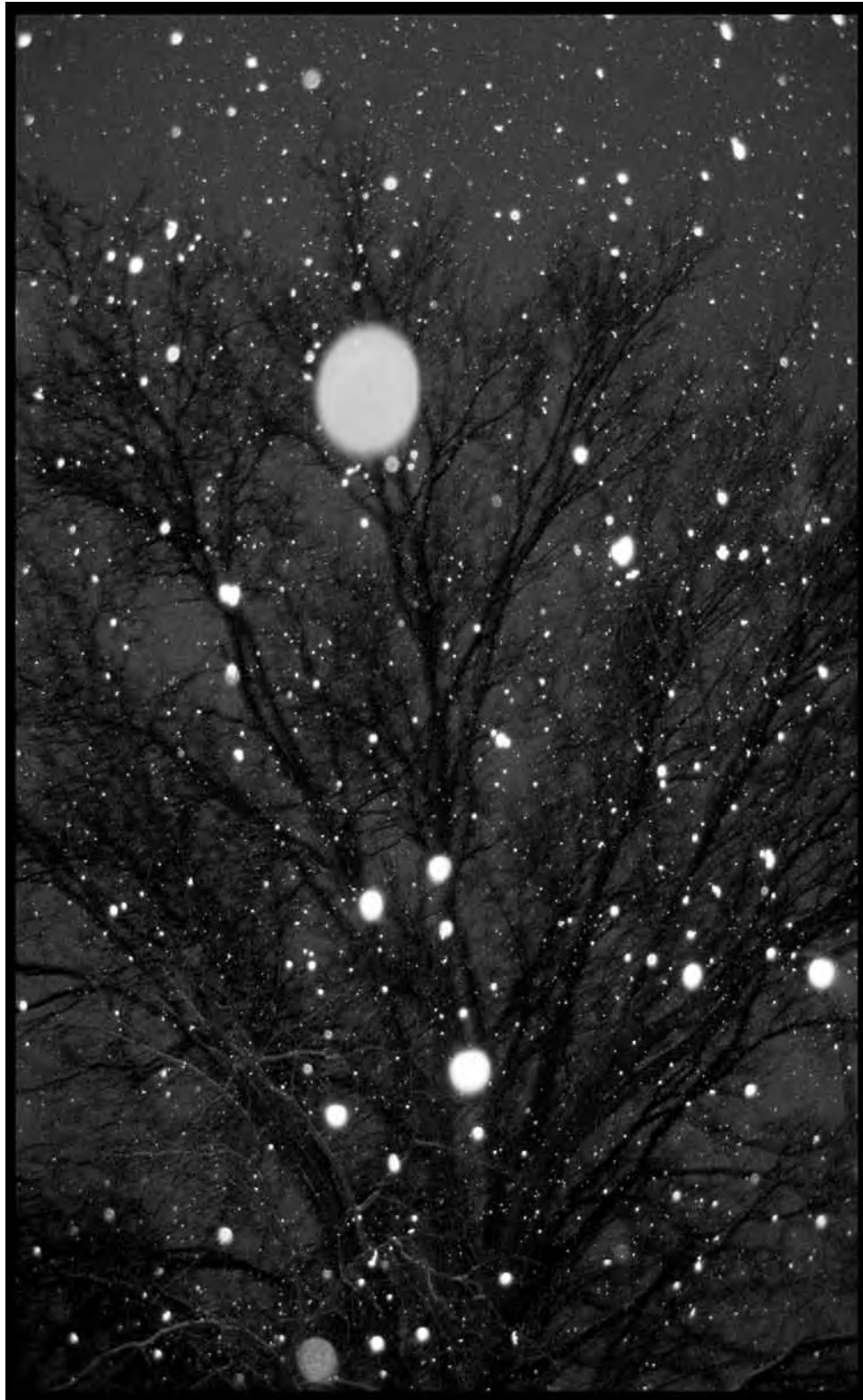
“I think the wishes are true & the Art matters.”

“Will I get to Dylan?”

“I think so.”

“Is the White Woods gone?”

“I don't think so. It burned down but it isn't gone.”



“Is there a last page?”

“I can’t answer that.”

“Are we dead?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what that would be.”

“Does it end?”

“I guess I hope not, Maya. What would have been the point?”

“I want to see the ocean with Dylan & Samantha. Somehow. In your book or his or both. I don’t care. That’s what I want.”

“Yes.”

The TV shuts off, one of them, & the drinkers at Luna T’s Cafe’s bar look around & at Preacher.

Mr. Bob the barman sidles up to the man. “You want a drink, bud? Glass of water? Or just to sit quiet awhile?”

Preacher says nothing a moment. “Do you know a man by the name of Bowie?”

Mr. Bob nods. “He’s been here before.” Pauses. “I think you have too.”

Preacher nods, maybe.

“Bowie’s not here.”

“Do you trust me?” says suddenly.

“I’m not sure but I think I should.”

Preacher does not nod this time, satisfied. The rest along the bar are listening hungrily, wondering if they’re on TV, if Preacher is from that show, what happened to the rest . . .

Mr. Bob nods & leads Preacher to a corner table. A familiar gesture of his to the rest indicates they’re in charge, police themselves, honor system . . .

“How much do you know?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Tell me what you can. Bowie is my partner. He’s my brother.”

“I know. I mean I don’t doubt you.”

“He was here recently?”

“Not long ago. His girl is here.”

“Gretta?”

“No. Well, yes, I suppose still in a way. I meant the younger one.”

“Left her here for safe keeping.”

“Yes . . .”

“It’s OK. I knew what this place was long ago.”

“Can I ask . . . ?”

“The woman who waited for me here? All that?”

“Not mine really to say but it’s not every day, or every man, who causes that look on a woman’s face.”

“I know. I don’t have an answer for you right now. And I have to know about Bowie. There’s trouble & danger, like usual.”

“So you’re a spy too?”

“Is that what he said?”

“More or less. He used to be here a lot.”

“Again, I don’t really have an answer for you. I’m sorry.” His face folds in sadness. Mr. Bob

cringes in empathy, feeling more for this man than might seem logical.

“The girl is still here. I can tell you where to find her.”

“The Ampitheatre? Don’t look surprised. I said I know this place.”

“Yes. I think so. Bowie did say keep her safe.”

Preacher stands, a tall thin man, a bit stooped, yet handsome, the handsome of years & thought & meditation, pain, reflection, a deep twist of beauty & pain.

“Thank you. I’ll talk to her.”

“I’m Mr. Bob, by the way. Charles.”

“I won’t stay long. I can’t & shouldn’t.” Nods, walks through oaken swinging door to band room, seems to know his way there & beyond.

[The weest of lines to tell how close to new work, Universe, Dad, so close, maybe hours, can it be so? Good work like I had, & more loyal. I believe so. I believe.]

viii. (xciii.)

Do I write your words or do you write mine? Whose are these then? I have no complaint for my purse, as this world operates in ways—

Well, yes, anyway.

I read your words: “Sniff the fecund world from a hid, ordinary place” & know you’re talking about pussy, about blood & consequence, about how nothing goes away & nothing returns, & so on—

I don’t want to go there, he broke me off to go elsewhere & I can’t say how that’s going when suddenly

*I look down at the straining girl’s face below me, the turquoise choker’s glint what retrieved me & I feel my cock thrusting in her, feel her riding but her face shows pain, something—
“too big” “don’t stop” “your little slut” “more!”*

I slow a touch, concealed in a heaving breath, to get a moment, she senses & her hips contract, tighter even as she’s so tight I—

now on top she is able to ride better, wanted to do well the other way but—wanted to do well?

now she rides, smiling licking her lips even, her hips spread widely & tight cunt now feeding on my cock rather than resisting—

something in me wants the advantage so I lean closer to her, pull her to me, bite her nipples hard even as I make sure every – fucking – thrust – hurts –

better—I don’t know where I am or how this—

Are you writing me? I copy out your next line: "Sniff its noise, an art, a statecraft, the intense light draping a high, hungry color"

*she's listening. Smoking a joint with me. Wearing my t-shirt too long on her. Told her no cigarettes, her tits too fucking gorgeous to rot them inside out. She nodded, nobody had ever put it to her in words she could fucking **get** before—*

Wants to suck me off again, promises to do it better, no, you've got enough of my sauce in & on your body for now—she nods—

*I want to fuck her again, in case something goes wrong but I don't—I make her pose for me—she's shy, she swears, but the hungry part of her, the lawless blood, the bestial wiseness, says, no, pose, he's had others, pose, let him take down your hair, let him adjust your fingertips to hold your tits how he likes, watching him hold & angle you & how he could be fucking you again, could be having you, willing, fuck his ten bestus buddies if he promised to **maybe** be the eleventh but no, pose, just fucking pose and—*

teach me.

"Teach you what?"

"Teach me how to write like you."

"Why would you want that?"

"Because! Fuck." Backs off a moment. "Because you get it. You get me." He says nothing.

"You could have had any girl in that place." "No." "Yes. Any smart one anyway."

"I can't teach you."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"Yes you do! Do you think I do this with any guy? You do know! You do fucking know!"

"No."

She stand up. Picks up her unlit cigarette.

"Sit down."

"Fuck you."

"Sit down."

"Fuck it, man."

"Sit, please."

*Uncertain, she sits. Something deep inside her cunt is clawing for more of him. Maybe he'll settle down & fuck her blind & selfish like every other guy. Their **fucking cock, glory be**. Stick it in & bring on the hosannas.*

"No."

"Please."

"Please what?"

"Please. Either. Fuck me again. Or teach me how to fucking write!" He laughs & she nearly dies. Nearly. There's no certainty in any of this, even knowing when to be embarrassed.

“Roll over.”

Perfect fucking ass. Perfect, round, cherry fucking ass. He lays lightly atop her & spreads her ass cheeks slowly, speaks, close, tongue close, she is horny & terrified both as she feels him breathing slow wet words into her ass, blowing right in: “Sniff the lies in calling the stars a heaven, in praising what buries in earth as carcass, as remain.” She cums so violently she finds herself clawing at him, he wrestles her down, roughly, ahh yes, finally, hold her down, that’s what they like, face in the pillow listening to that hoarse ball of words, feeling that cock about its business, he stops.

He stops. She’s spread, clutched tightly by him, whether he wants her raw cunt again or try that ass he was blowing. What fight in her is gone save to get him in, what fight was there anyway? He stops.

She’d come back into the coffee house, forgot her cell phone in the weird ass booth they’d been sitting all night, her & the two friends who’d never been laid & kept asking about it, how much it hurt, over & fucking over. Did it hurt? Did it feel good? What was cumming like? What did a guy’s cock taste like? Did you really swallow?

No. Wait. She was the other hot girl, the brunette in the tight short top & pants, writing in her notebook, at first serious, then not because she couldn’t keep going like that, then saw him writing, looking crazy but really into it, & she got hot for no good reason, & then she was writing to show him that . . . she was writing too.

Then? He’d fucked her in the elevator coming up here. He’d fucked her again just inside the front door. He’d—

“Teach me.”

“No.”

“Teach me!”

“No.”

She is still twined with him & he spasms when she accidentally licks his ear lobe. Ahh. OK. Lick. “Teach me.” Nothing. Lick harder. “Teach me.” Nothing, less. Lick & suck slowly, spasm she barely holds down. Ahh.

On her tummy he is writing in blood a little his, a little hers: “Sniff the world’s constant hungers, drying here, new wetting up there.”

She smiles. Knowing what to get meant knowing how to get it. Strangely, for a moment, she remembered Maya. Those long nights back then. The smoke, the rooms, never knowing what happened.

What happened. Wait. No. What the fuck happened?

Coffee shop. Fuck. Watching him at an awkward angle in his chair next to hers, oblivious to her, write: “The world awful with its making scents, where kind & fine, where cruel, where flesh wilds for flesh & not a coin, not a king, not a god in any skies—”

“Despite”

He looks up, catches me watching, catches me fucking reciting his fucking words. Shit. I smile. That usually works well enough. His look says no, he isn’t buying it. He’s about to look back down & fade

back somewhere deep inside himself when I say out loud: "Teach me."

"There's cost."

"What? Like money?"

"No."

"You mean sex? I don't mind. I like it."

"No."

"What then?"

"I have no friends in this book. No allies. I'm just telling you."

She smiles. I like thinking of her smiling lips wet with my cum but say nothing. That's for later. More than she can imagine.

"I have a friend. Her name is Penelope. We call her Penny really. She's nice."

"And."

She's thinking how much to say. Wants that cigarette. Remembers my remark about it being tit-rotters. It works for now.

"Just tell me."

"What's my name?"

"What?"

"What's my fucking name? Do I have one or are you going to just call me Swallow or Bitch?"

I laugh, she squirms. Waits.

"Do you want me to name you?"

"Yes. And one more thing."

"OK."

"Just tell me before you fuck somebody else. OK? I won't get mad, I just want to know. OK?"

I nod. A name. We both wait.

"Just say it."

"Well, two. You won't like them."

"Worse than Swallow or Bitch?"

"Ariadne. Eurydice."

She nods. "I'll settle for Adrienne."

"Tell me about Penny."

"She lives with this guy. I mean, she did. It's been awhile."

"And?"

Her face tightens.

"Tell me, Adrienne. We need help."

"For what? For writing? There's no law against it. For sex? I'm legal. I consented."

"Tell me."

"Fuck! Fine. Penny & her boyfriend run a safe house. It's complicated."

"The War. The ships overhead."

She starts. "Yah."

"I know all about this."

"Then—?"

"Will she let us stay? Awhile?"

"She's my friend. You said we need allies."

"Do you know why?"



She shakes her head. For a moment I want to let her go, & I don't. But when I don't, new dangers appear.

"Adrienne, part of the War is for control of the book."

"Which book?"

"The one you saw me writing. There's another one. That version doesn't end. This one will."

She stares.

"There's more. Do you know about the White Woods?"

She starts. Shakes her head, nearly falls off her seat.

"Maya?"

*"Fuck you! Fuck you! **Fuck you!**"*

"Sit."

*"No. **Fuck this.**"*

"Sit!"

She's standing. Getting hysterical.

"You got out. Maya did too."

Stares, shaking.

"If you come with me, be with me, we may have to go back."

She whispers: "It burnt down." Crumples to her knees.

"No."

"There's more to it."

*"I saw it **burn.**"*

"You can't burn the whole world, Nikki."

"I thought you named me Adrienne."

"No. I was wrong. You are too fucking sexy for that name. I'm going to call you Nikki Sunshine"

She smiles. Nothing resolved. Except that she's with me. In my lap right now as I write this, wiggling her fine ass against my hard cock for hint.

After I fuck her we'll sleep & then find Penny.

Jack hasn't moved in hours. Until this moment he has simply sat here, somewhere below the Bridge of Glass, with the girl's head in his lap, rocking.

She's not dead. Skin not cold. Shallow breathing. It's there.

What now. I'm noticed. I can't sit here any longer.

He nudges the girl, afraid to look at her face. She doesn't wake. Shit.

Tick fucking tock. Alright then, I'll bite—

Looks at me—

"You'll let me save her"

"A question?"

"No."

"What do you want, Jack? Go in & find out. OK?"

"I'm bringing her back."

"Which one? Both? Does it matter?"

He stumbles going in, stumbles but does not fall. Stumbles but does not fall but is turned slightly from his path. Turned slightly from his path, the angles & shadows. Turned slightly from his path, the angles & shadows, what clouds reveal in the sky. What they don't. What the

clouds reveal in the sky & what they don't & how that distorts Jack's perception—

He was supposed to be here an hour later, not supposed to arrive at this party early enough to find Penny's face crushed against a wall as the man rougher than needs to pull down her skirt & thong—she unsure, even now, even with that hot little ass on stage, even with her cunt lips wet, even—*even*—says nothing, not even a moan—maybe he will hesitate, just a moment, & it will calm down all this—no—he pushes her thighs wider apart & crouches a bit but she feels it driving into her, boring, different from Jack's, thicker, he likes letting it in her slower—thinks it feels better like that—doesn't know sometimes she just wants it *hard*—she winces at what she gets, how it feels, his breathing isn't Jack's, the way his quicks & slows, the way she can know where he's at by his breath—this man breathes steadily—no music in it—she's liking this less—liking how it came to this less—liking how this strange cock in her & the heavy pushing body against her—trying to get it deeper than her pussy—that would be fine—enough—

“Enough”

Said so softly it wasn't even sextalk.

“Enough”

He fucks harder, liking the wet lost sound of her voice, wanting her to beg til the moment he crushes her orgasm out of her—

“Enough!” Her first physical push doesn't faze him—he's too much bigger & stronger—

Then she simply juts hard & down along the wall, & his cock slips out. What the *fuck*—

“Enough”

“Enough what?”

“I don't want to”

“We're here because of you. What's this? Is Jack coming through the door? Not that I would care so much—”

“No. Not for an hour.”

He's got her pushed up against the wall, still half-dressed. She knows enough to see this will play out in talk or he'll just maul her & maybe enjoy that more—

Sees Jack behind him. What? *Fuck*.

“Get off her.”

“Oh. Hi, Jack.”

“Let her go now.”

“Why don't we share. She seems skittish”—

No. This is wrong. *Fuck* I'm in but no.

Think. Think!

It's about the Bridge of Glass, isn't it? Always has been.

I have to go back.

“You knew that, Jack”

“Thanks, Benny”

“We're not enemies.”

“What then?”

"I can help."

"How?"

"Leave her here."

"No."

"You can't take her, Jack. You need her safe. I can do that for you."

"Why did I jump the bridge, then?"

Benny laughs. "So she would jump after you." Pauses. "Now you know who to hunt down."



To be continued in Cenacle | 78 | June 2011



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Tom Sheehan**Burial for Horsemen***(For my father, blind too early)*

The night we listened to an Oglala life
 on records, and shadows remembered
 their routes up the railed stairway like
 a prairie presence, I stood at your bed

counting the days you had conquered.
 The bottlecap moon clattered into your
 room in vagrant pieces . . . jagged blades
 needing a strop or wheel for stabbing,

great spearhead chips pale in falling,
 necks of smashed jars rasbora bright,
 thin flaked edges tossing off the sun.
 Under burden of the dread collection,

you sighed and turned in quilted repose
 and rolled your hand in mine, searching
 for lighting only found in your memory.
 In moon's toss I saw the network of your

brain struggling for my face the way you
 last saw it, a piece of light falling under
 the hooves of a thousand horse ponies,
 night campsites riding upward in flames,

the skyline coming legendary.

* * *

Sign on a Wall

The dough board, oblique,
worn to a frazzle, now hangs
in the cellar way. Knuckles
of love soft shoe across it.

Like a fallow field it lies,
fifty years since my mother
powdered and rolled dough
into its grain, beginning bread.

Her hands, white-knuckled,
went board to dough to fore-
head to the plain blue apron
smelling of rolls, haitch

bones, sweat and anxiety.
She struggled great breads
out of its surface, morning
fried dough sizzling in oil,

a sure birthday cake three
tiers tall on special days,
and wrung from its granary
pains and aches and tired

bones, migraine's soft thunder,
age, a shot at infirmity.
That old board, edges like
fingers, hangs awry on a nail

my father drove to catch a jacket;
if I bang it hard enough, fisted,
belligerent about recall, a small
cloud of powder floats her love.

* * *

A Voice Touching

A drunk startles me
from a doorway.

He cries against
his mother's arms,

into darkness
and nothing of daylight,

which has gone like a thief
over the stonewall at street's end.

His wail vibrates
slowly off the curbstone,

goes cold, curb-gray,
weak as a river

out of sight
under thick alders.

He is not alone despite
all this loneliness,

this cold street,
September touching pavement,

Saturday touching
Sunday, acceptance,

being what you are
and where you're supposed to be.

I keep seeing
the dark doorman

stashed in his cubicle,
shaded, ragged, dreaming

of the door opening, light
spilling on his hands,

night flaking its pieces
from his soft shoes,

a voice touching
where his mouth went.

* * * * *

Terence McKenna



Eros and the Eschaton

[Essay]

*Lecture given in 1994 at Kane Hall at
the University of Washington in Seattle*

Eros and the Eschaton—these are the two areas that I think compromise the old paradigm and give permission to hope; and strangely, neither of these words is that well known, which gives you a measure of how completely the dominator position has squelched, subverted, and downplayed any opposition to its worldview. Eros, we know about, in some kind of devalued, schticky kind of glitzy way, because we get it in the eroticization of media and society. But really, what Eros means in the Greek sense is a kind of unity of nature, a kind of all-pervasive order that bridges one ontological level to another. This is not permitted in the official worldview of our civilization, which is science. The world of inorganic chemistry is not thought to make any statement about the organic world, and the organic world is not thought to be extrapolatable into the world of culture and thought. There are imagined to be clear breaks in these categories. I had a biologist tell me once, “If genes aren’t involved, it ain’t evolution.” So that means you can’t talk about the evolution of the Earth as a physical body; you can’t talk about the evolution of human social institutions; evolution is somehow a word appropriate to biology and appropriate nowhere else.

And this brings me, then, to the first factor easily discerned by anybody who has their eyes open, that compromises and erodes the hopeless existential view of the world that we’re getting from science. And that is the idea that nature is, in fact, across all scales and all levels of phenomena, a unity. It’s not a coincidence that electrons spinning around an atomic nucleus, and planets going around a star, and star clusters orbiting around the gravitational center of a galaxy, exhibit the same kind of order on different scales. And yet science would say that is a coincidence. You know, P.W. Bridgeman, who was a philosopher of science, defined a coincidence as what you have left over when you apply a bad theory! It means, you know, that you’ve overlooked something, and what jumps out at you as a coincidence is actually a set of relationships whose casuistry—whose relationships to each other are simply hidden from you.

And what I’ve observed—and I think it is fair to give credit to the psychedelic experience for this—what I’ve observed is that nature builds on previously established levels of complexity. This is a great general natural law that your own senses will confirm for you, but that has never been allowed into the canon of science. What I mean by that nature builds on complexity is the following: When the universe was born, in the dubious and controversial circumstance called the Big Bang, it was at first simply a pure plasma of electrons. It was the simplest that it could possibly be. There were no atoms, there were no molecules, there were no highly organized systems of any kind. There was simply a pure plasma of expanding energy. And as the universe cooled, simply cooled, new kinds of phenomena emerged out of the situation. As the universe cooled, atomic nuclei could form, and electrons could settle into stable orbits. As the universe

further cooled, the chemical bond became a possibility. Still later, the hydrogen bond, which is a weaker bond, which is the basis of biology.

So as the universe aged, it complexified. This is so obvious that it's never really been challenged, but on the other hand it's never been embraced as a general and dependable principle, either. Follow it through with me. Out of atomic systems come chemical systems. Out of chemical systems comes the covalent hydrogen bond, the carbon bond, the complex chemistry that is prebiotic or organic. Out of that chemistry come the macrophysical systems that we call membranes, gels, charge transfer complexes, this sort of thing. These systems are the chemical preconditions for life. Simple life, the life of the prokaryotes, the life of naked unnucleated DNA that characterized primitive life on the planet. Out of that life come eukaryotes, nucleated cells, and then complex colonies of cells. And then cell specialization, leading to higher animals; leading to social animals; leading to complex social systems; leading to technologies; leading to globe-girdling electronically based information transfer-oriented cultures like ourselves. Someone said, "What's so progressive about media? It's the spreading of darkness at the speed of light." It can be . . . it can be.

Well, so this is very interesting; that apparently, the way the universe works is upon a platform of previously achieved complexity—chemical, electrical, social, biological, whatever. New forms of complexity can be built that cross these ontological boundaries. In other words, what I mean by that is that biology is based on complex chemistry, but it is more than complex chemistry. Social systems are based on the organization that is animal life; and yet it is more than animal life. So this is a general law of the universe, overlooked by science—that out of complexity emerges greater complexity. We could almost say that the universe, nature, is a novelty-conserving or complexity-conserving engine. It makes complexity, and it preserves it. And it uses it as the basis for further complexity.

Now there's more to this than simply that. I think we all observationally could agree with what has been said so far. The added wrinkle, or an added wrinkle, is that each advancement into complexity, into novelty, proceeds more quickly than the stage that preceded it. This is very profound, because if accepted as a serious first principle it ends the marginalization of our own species to the level of spectator status in a universe that knows nothing of us and cares nothing for us. This is the most advanced position that modern science will allow us: spectators to a drama we didn't write, shouldn't expect to understand, and cannot influence.

But I say, if in fact novelty is the name of the game, if in fact the conservation and complexification of novelty is what the universe is striving for, then suddenly our own human enterprise, previously marginalized, takes on an immense new importance. We are apparently players in the cosmic drama, and in this particular act of the cosmic drama we hold a very central role. We are at the pinnacle of the expression of complexification in the animal world, and somehow this complexity, which is concentrated in us, has flowed over out of the domain of animal organization and into this mysterious domain which we call culture, language, consciousness, higher values. Each stage of advancement into complexity occurs more quickly than the stage that preceded it. After the initial Big Bang, there was a period of billions of years when the universe cooled, stars condensed, planetary systems formed, and then the quickening process crossed an invisible Rubicon into the domain of animal and biological organization.

Well, you see, since the rise of Western monotheism, the human experience has been marginalized. We have been told that we were unimportant in the cosmic drama. But we now know, from the feedback that we're getting from the impact of human culture on the Earth,

that we are a major factor shaping the temperatures of the oceans, the composition of the atmosphere, the general speed and complexity of speciation on the planet, and so forth and so on. A single species, ourselves, has broken from the ordinary constraints of animal nature and created a new world, an epigenetic world—meaning a world not based on gene transfer and chemical propagation and preservation of information, but a world based on ideas, on symbols, on technologies, on tools, on ideas downloaded out of the human imagination and concretized in three-dimensional space as choppers, arrow points, particle accelerators, gene sequencers, space craft, what have you—all of this complexification occurring at a faster and faster rate.

And this brings me, then, to the second quality, or phenomenon, that science has overlooked, which is the acceleration of complexification. That the early history of the universe proceeded with excruciating slowness; then, life took hold, in the oceans of this planet. A quickening of process and evolution; but still things proceeded on a scale of tens of millions of years to clock major change. Then, the conquest of the land. Higher animals, higher exposure to radiation, faster change, species following species, one upon another. Then, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, a million years ago—anyway, recently!—the crossover into the domain of culture, tool-making, myth-making, dance, poetry, song, story; and that set the stage for the fall into history—the incredibly unusual and self-consuming process that has been going on for the past fifteen or twenty thousand years. A biological snap of the finger; and yet, in that time, everything that we call human—everything that we associated with higher values—has been adumbrated, elaborated, created, set in place, by one species: ourselves.

This acceleration of time, or complexity, shows no sign of slowing down. In fact, within the fabric of our own lives, we can almost daily, hourly, by the minute, feel it speeding up, taking hold. It's a cliché that time is moving faster and faster—a cliché of the mass media—but I want to suggest that this is not a perceptual illusion, or a cultural mirage: that this is actually happening to the space-time matrix, that time *is in fact* speeding up. That history—in which we are embedded, because our life of 50–80 years is so ephemeral on a scale of 10–15,000 years—but nevertheless, history, is a state of incredible destabilization. It's a chaostrophy in the process of happening. It begins with animals kept in balance by natural selection, and it ends with a global internet of electronic information transfer and a language-using species purling its instruments toward the stars.

There is no reason for us to suppose that this process of acceleration is ever going to slow down or be deflected. It has been a law of nature from the very beginning of nature, that this acceleration was built in. What poses a problem, to us as thinking individuals, is that the speed of involution towards concrescence is now so great that we can feel the tug of it within the confines of our own lives. There has been more change since 1960 than in the previous several thousand years. There has been more change since 1992 than in the previous thousand years. Change is accelerating. Invention, connection, adumbration of ideas, mathematical algorithms, connectivity of people, social systems, this is all accelerating furiously, and under the control of no one—not the Catholic church, the community party, the IMF, no one is in charge of this process! This is what makes history so interesting: it's a runaway freight train on a dark and stormy night! This is why I'm not particularly sympathetic to conspiracy theory—because I can't make the leap of faith that would cause you to believe anyone could get hold of the beast enough to control it! I mean, we have conspiracies up the kazoo; but none of them are succeeding! They're all being swept away, compromised, astonished by new information,

and endlessly agonized!

So, two factors relating to Eros: the movement into complexity, and the fact that that movement goes ever faster. And the second quality, the acceleration of the movement into novelty, leads me to the third point, which is I suppose more controversial—and I am frankly willing to admit that my sensitivity to this third point is based on my psychedelic experience. I mean, science is the exploration of the experience of nature without psychedelics. And I propose therefore to expand that enterprise and say we need a science beyond science—we need a science which plays with a full deck. And the reason the psychedelic experience is so important here is not some namby-pamby notion that it expands consciousness, or it makes you more perceptive, or something like that. I mean, that is all true, but it isn't strongly enough put.

A cultural point of view is like a crystal: you have an amorphous cultural medium which at certain temperatures will form a crystal of cultural convention, if you will, and within the geometry of that crystal certain things make sense and certain things are excluded from making sense. Science is a condensed cultural point of view that is a rigid crystal of interlocking assumptions—assumptions such as: matter is primary; mind is tertiary; causality works from the past into the future; and so forth and so on. What psychedelics do, in terms of impact on the physical brain and organism of human beings, is they withdraw cultural programming. They dissolve cultural assumptions. They lift you out of that reassuring crystal and matrix of interlocking truths that are lies, and instead they throw you into the presence of the great Who Knows? The mystery that has been banished from Western thought since the rise of Christianity and the suppression of the mystery religions.

Now, the model that attracts me to the psychedelic experience is not that it makes you smarter—a kind of simple-minded idea, paradoxically—or the idea that it's some kind of magnifying glass into the personal unconscious—your trauma, your childhood memories, the satanic abuse your parents laid on you, and so forth and so on. The model which I like is a geometric model, and says simply that since the rise of the Greek alphabet, print, linear thinking, and science, we have become imprisoned in a causal universe of material connectivity—and that this is a cultural myth, as much as believing that we are the sons and daughters of the great father who got out of his canoe at the second waterfall to take a leak; I mean, these are just cultural myths. What is revealed through the psychedelic experience, I think, is a higher-dimensional perspective on reality. And I use “higher-dimensional” in the mathematical sense—literally, you are lifted out of the plane of cultural assumptions and can look down, with a kind of god-like understanding that one obtains when one flies in an airplane over a landscape previously only viewed from the ground. In other words, from the vantage point of the psychedelic experience, the cultural landscape is seen more nearly in its correct perspective. Seen as historically bounded, spatially and intellectually bounded.

Now it's no coincidence that if you analyze biology, what it is, it's a kind of conquest of dimensionality. The earliest forms of life were probably slimes of some sort, stabilized on a clay surface—immobile, unable to perceive light, with no sense of time, merely a fingernail or a toehold in existence. And then if you look at the entire fossil record, what you see is the evolution of senses—sensory preceptors, and organs of locomotion. The preceptors—the eye, the hand—bring into the cognitive field the sense of things at a distance, and then language provides models for these things at a distance. Similarly, fins, legs, so forth—means of locomotion—carry us through space. This is a journey of dimensionality, and essentially

what animals are that plants are not are life-forms mobile, in a very conscious way, in a spatial dimension. This is why, from the point of view of evolutionary biologists, animals are somehow more advanced than plants.

Well, if conquest of dimensionality is the criteria, then notice that we again occupy a special and privileged position in nature, because we can not only run with the best of them, see with the best of them, but we can remember and anticipate like crazy—and other animals are not doing this. Other animals may imprint past situations of danger or opportunity, but they do not analyze experience and extrapolate it toward the hidden domain of the future. And consciousness is the generalized word that we use for this coordination of complex perception to create a world that draws from the past and builds a model of the future—and then suspends a perceiving organism in this magical moment called the Now, where the past is coordinated for the purpose of navigating the future. McLuhan called it “driving with the rear view mirror,” and the only thing good about it is it’s better than driving with no mirror at all!

What this conquest of dimensionality comes to be, in the presence of psychedelics, is an anticipation of the future. We can anticipate the future: we know to within microseconds when the sun will rise; we know within a few percentage points where the prime rate will be in six months; some things we can predict fairly closely, some things with less precision. But the perception of the future is very important to us. When we marry the need to perceive the future with the psychedelic experience, I believe we come up with data that is very difficult for science to come to terms with. And this is the third item, or really the second item, in the list of what science forgot. It’s what I call the Eschaton.

Now, Eschaton is a rare word, until very recently unheard outside schools of theology, which I understand were a dying enterprise. Eschaton comes from the Greek word *esch*, which just means the end. The Eschaton is the last thing, the final thing. And it’s very important to science to eliminate from its thinking any suspicion that this Eschaton might exist. Because if it were to exist, it would impart to reality a purpose, you see. If the Eschaton exists, then it’s like a goal, or an attraction point, or an energy synch, toward which historical process is being moved. And science is incredibly hostile toward the idea of purpose. If you are not involved in the sciences, this may come as somewhat of a surprise to you. If you are a workbench scientist or a theoretician, you know that this is what’s called the problem of teleology. It is because modern science defined itself in the nineteenth century, when the reigning philosophy was deism, and deism was the idea that the universe is a clock made by God, and God wound this clock and has walked away from it, and the clock will eventually run down. That theological construct was poisonous to evolutionary theory in the nineteenth century, and so they said, “We must create a theory of reality that does not require a goal—does not require a purpose. Everything must be pushed from the past. Nothing must be pulled toward the future.”

The problem with this is that it does not fulfill our intuitions about reality. We can see that evolution, biological evolution, has built on chemical systems. We can see that social and historical systems build on biology. As people with open minds—or as open as they can be, inside this culture—we nevertheless have this intuition of purpose. And it is dramatically underscored by the psychedelic experience, which takes the raw material of your life, your culture, your history, and tells you this is not an existential mishmash to be lived out with dignity because there’s nothing else to be done with it—some kind of Camusian “Why not?” affirmation. It says, *No*. It says, *Your reality is a coherent cosmos*. And embedded in your own sense of identity, embedded in your own sense of purpose, is a microscopic reflection of the

larger purpose that is built into the universe.

This is not just blowing smoke, in the sense of “it’s a nice idea,” or it’s like a religious idea, like saying Jesus loves you, and so feel all right about yourself. It isn’t like that—it’s a theory about reality that has teeth, because reality is actually following the script that this particular version of reality dictates. Reality is accelerating toward an unimaginable omega point. We are the inheritors of immense momentum in our social systems, our philosophical and scientific and technological approaches to the world. Because we’re driving the historical vehicle with a rear-view mirror, it appears to us that we’re headed straight into a brick wall at a thousand miles an hour. It appears that we are destroying the Earth, polluting the atmosphere, wrecking the oceans, dehumanizing ourselves, robbing our children of a future, and so forth and so on. I believe what is in fact going on is that we are burning our bridges, one by one. We are burning our bridges to the past. We cannot go back to the mushroom-dotted plains of Africa, or the canopied rainforests of five million years ago. We can’t even go back to the era of the Houston six-shooter of two hundred years ago. We have burned our bridges—we are preparing for a kind of cultural forward escape.

And so the question someone recently asked me—“Is there cause for optimism?”—the answer is, it depends on where you placed your bets! You know, if you placed your bets on male-dominated institutions based on consumer fetishism, propaganda, classism, and materialism, then God help you, you should call your broker! If, on the other hand, you’ve recognized that a lifeboat strategy is involved here—that what is really important is empowering personal experience, backing off from consumer object fetishism, freeing the mind, empowering the imagination—, then in that case I think you can feel pretty good about what is going on.

You know, there’s a lot of talk about cultural death and disenfranchisement, and it’s usually couched in terms of some happy naked people in the rainforest, or in Tajikistan making their rugs, or milking their camels or something, and isn’t it too bad that their culture is being blown up and traded in for mall culture and shopping by remote; but in fact, all culture is being destroyed. All culture is being sold down the river by the sorts of people who want to turn the entire planet into an international airport arrival concourse! And that’s not the victory of somebody’s culture over somebody else’s culture; nobody ever had a culture like that! That’s just the victory of schlockmeisterism and crapola over good taste and good sense!

Well, if I were dependent on the notion that human institutions are necessary to pull us out of the ditch, I would be very despairing. As I said, nobody’s in charge—not the IMF, the Pope, the Communist Party, the Jews, no, nobody has their finger on what’s going on. So then, why hope? Isn’t it just a runaway train, out of control? I don’t think so. I think the out-of-controlness is the most hopeful thing about it! After all, whose control is it out of? You and I never controlled it in the first place! Why are *we* anxious about the fact that it’s out of control? I think if it’s out of control, then our side is winning!

To me, the most confounding datum of the psychedelic experience is this thing, which I call the Eschaton. The conclusion I draw here is we are central to the human drama, and to the drama of nature and process on this planet.

Every model of the universe has a hard swallow. What I mean by a hard swallow is a place where the argument cannot hide the fact that there’s something slightly fishy about it. The hard swallow built into science is this business about the Big Bang. Now let’s give this a little attention here. This is the notion that the universe, for no reason, sprang from nothing in a single instant. Before we dissect this, notice that this is the limit test for credulity. Whether



you believe this or not, notice that it is not possible to conceive of something more unlikely or less likely to be believed! I mean, I defy anyone—it's just the limit case for unlikelihood, that the universe would spring from nothing in a single instant, for no reason!—I mean, if you believe that, my family has a bridge across the Hudson River that we'll give you a lease option for five dollars! It makes no sense. It is in fact no different than saying, "And God said, let there be light." And what these philosophers of science are saying is, give us one free miracle, and we will roll from that point forward—from the birth of time to the crack of doom!—just one free miracle, and then it will all unravel according to natural law, and these bizarre equations which nobody can understand but which are so holy in this enterprise.

Well, I say then, if science gets one free miracle, then everybody gets one free miracle. And I perceive that it is true, when you build these large-scale cosmogonic theories, that you have to have a kind of an umbilical cord, or a point to start from that is different from all other points in the system. So if we have to have a singularity in our modeling of what reality is, let's make it as modest and as non-unlikely a singularity as possible. The singularity that arises for no reason, in absolutely empty space, instantly, is the least likely of all singularities. Doesn't it seem more likely, if we have to have a singularity, that it occurs in a domain with a rich history, with many causal streams feeding into the situation that nurtures the complexity? In other words, to put it simply, if you have to have a singularity, doesn't it make more sense to put it at the end of a cosmogonic process, than at the beginning?

And I think this is the great breakthrough of psychedelics and shamanism, that science got it absolutely wrong: the universe didn't begin in a singularity—who knows how the universe began, or would even presume to judge?—but the universe *ends* in a singularity. It has been growing more singular, more complex, more unique, more novel, every passing moment since it burst into existence. And if that's true, then we represent a kind of concrescence of universal intent. We're not mere spectators, or a cosmic accident, or some side-show, or the Greek chorus to the main event—the human experience *is* the main event. The coordination of perception, of hope, of dream, of vision, that occurs inside the human heart/mind/body interface is the most complex phenomenon in the universe.

Even the physicalists will agree that the human neocortex represents the most densely ramified matter known to exist in the biological world—and you don't have to be a rocket scientist to see that human society, human history, human art, human literature, represent things for which there is no analogue in the world of wasps, groundhogs, killer whales, and so forth and so on. In our species, complexity has turned inward upon itself. And in our species, time has accelerated—time has left the gentle ebb and flow of gene transfer and adaptation that characterizes biological evolution, and instead historical time is generated. And so I believe that science and its reluctance to deal with the psychedelic experience—and the way in which science has used, then, law, to suppress its rival, in this case—arises out of a profound discomfort on the part of science about this future state of complexification that is clearly the grail, the dwellpoint, the endpoint, of the human historical process.

No one of us, I think, can imagine that history could go on for another thousand years. I mean, what would it look like? At the current rate of population growth, spread of epidemic disease, rate of invention, connectivity, depletion of resources, the atmosphere—it is impossible to conceive of another thousand years of human history. History, then, is ending. History is a kind of gestation process; it's a kind of metamorphosis; it's an episode in the life of a species. If you think of the simple example of metamorphosis—that of caterpillar

to butterfly—we all know that there is this intermediate resting stage where the caterpillar is, for all practical purposes, enzymatically dissolved, and then reconstituted as an entirely different kind of organism, with different physical structures, different eyes, different legs, a different way of breathing; with wings, where no wings were before; with a different kind of feeding apparatus—this is what’s happening to us! History is a process of metamorphosis. It’s a pupation stage. It begins with naked monkeys, and it ends with a human machine planet-girdling interface capable of releasing the energies that light the stars! And it lasts about fifteen or twenty thousand years, and during that period the entire process hangs in the balance. It’s a period of high risk. It’s like what a butterfly is doing in a cocoon, or what is happening to a child in the womb—it’s a gestation process, where one form of life is being changed into another.

This would all happen naturally, and with a great deal of anxiety I imagine, as history builds to its ever more climactic and horrifying crescendo, and we would all be ignorant, or very baffled, about what’s going on, were it not for the institution of psychedelic shamanism. Remember when I said that what is dissolved are the crystalline structures of cultural assumption? Well, one of the strongest symmetries in our cultural crystal is the symmetry that gathers around the concept of past and future. The shaman actually rises into a domain where past and future are different areas on the same topological manifold. This is not a metaphor; it’s what’s really going on. If you think about shamanism in its classical guise for a moment, it is about predicting weather; predicting game movement; and curing disease. If you had a prescient or extraordinary understanding of the future, each one of us would be able to do these things. Predicting the weather? You just look into next week, and there it is. Predicting the movement of beings? Same deal. Curing the sick actually involves very judicious choice of your patients, with a pre-knowledge of who will get well and who will not get well.

So it’s as though the members of a culture are imprisoned in linear time, and the shaman is not. And why not? Because the shaman has perturbed the brain states sanctioned by the culture—sanctioned by its educational processes, its habits, its attitudes. And into that vacuum created by the perturbation of these cultural values rushes the raw, unanalyzed datum of reality. This is what Aldous Huxley called removing the reducing valve of consciousness. And suddenly, culture is seen to be a relative phenomenon, the stockbroker no different from the rainforest shaman, each somewhat similar to the Trobrian islander, or the Eskimo. Culture is simply clothing upon the human experience—but the human organism, outside the confines of culture, in a direct relationship to nature, transcends time and space. This was a fact, I believe, that was known in prehistory, and in fact was the source of paleolithic values, which were not material, not linear, not surplus-oriented, not class-oriented, not power-oriented—but rather, oriented toward a kind of egalitarian partnership in an environment of great material simplicity. And human beings lived like that for probably half a million years—with poetry, with dance, with mathematics, with magic, with story, with humor—but not with the paralyzing and toxic artifacts of the late-evolving, machine-worshipping, monotheistic, linear, phonetic-alphabet tight-assed straight culture that we are a part of.

So now, at a kind of moment of great cultural challenge and dynamic for Western civilization, which has for a thousand years called all the shots and shoved itself down everybody’s throat whether they liked it or not—and in the last hundred years, through the science of anthropology and ethnography and ethnomedicine and botany—, the news has arrived that these “primitive” people are in fact master technicians of journeying into a world of

the neurological imagination—a world we didn't even know exists. A world that is as distant to us as the world at the heart of the atom is from the rainforest fishermen. And because our own cultural values seem a little shoddy at this moment, those on the fringes of Western civilization have begun to seek alternatives, begun to look at alternative religions (yoga, tantra, Buddhism, Zen, whatever), alternative approaches to diet (vegetarianism, macrobiotics, and so forth and so on), and alternative approaches to authentic experience, which means psychedelics.

In the early stage of psychedelic involvement, everyone was sort of flying under the banner of hands-on Freudianism, or hands-on Jungianism. *We're gonna see those archetypes. We're gonna confront those sexual repressions. We're gonna journey into those traumatic childhood memories.* Now, it's understood, I think, that those metaphors were fairly inadequate, and that actually we stand on the brink of an unexplored landscape of planetary size. The world of the high paleolithic, which is a Gaian world, a world of feeling—not analytical intellectual constructs, but a world of empowered feeling. Empathy, and intuitive understanding, an understanding that doesn't arise in a context of Greek logic, but in a context of animal knowing in the authentic mode of the body.

So, just to bring it all around here, the great exhibit that we must always keep in front of ourselves, and our critics, is the mystery of the human mind and body. No one knows how it is that I can command my hand to make a fist and that it will do that. I mean, that's mind over matter—that's the violation of every scientific principle in the books. And yet it is the most trivial experience any of us have; we expect to command our body. We expect the mental will to order the monkey flesh into action, and it will follow. The body is the nexus of the mystery of life. And our culture takes us out of the body, and sells our loyalty into political systems, into religions, into inanimate objects and machines, collections, and so forth and so on. The felt experience of the body is what the psychedelics are handing back to us—that's why it's called *escape*, because it's escape from HBO, from walking the mall, from seeing what's on the tube, from consuming trash media. It's escape from all of that, into the authenticity of the body. This is why sexuality is so . . . edgy in this society. They'd make it illegal if they could but figure out how! It's the one drug they can't tear from our grip, and so they lay a guilt trip about it.

But sexuality and psychedelics are carrying us back to an authentic sense of the body. Carrying us back to the domain of authentic values. And more and more, the message that people are getting as they avail themselves of the psychedelic experience is that it is not a journey into the human unconscious, or into the ghost bardos of our chaotic civilization. It's a journey into the presence of the Gaian mind, that the Earth is a coherent whole. It is a thinking, feeling, intending, being—that, in terms of our value structures, it would be foolish to image as anything other than female. And when cultural values created by male dominance and science and linearity and so forth and so on—when those values are dissolved, what is waiting there is this incredibly poignant experience of the matrix—what James Joyce called the *Mama Matrix Most Mysterious*. Nothing more than our bodies and the earth out of which our bodies came.

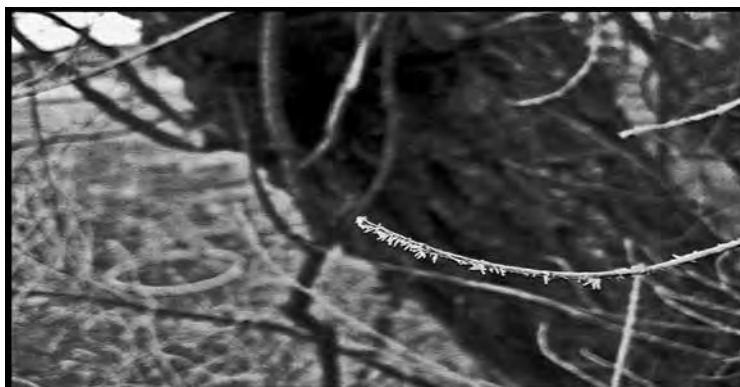
History, as we have lived it in the West, has been a turning of our back on that—and now history has failed. Western cultural institutions, having become global institutions, now show themselves to be inadequate to inspire, lead, or carry anyone into a future worth living in. At this moment, then, this reconnecting to the Gaian mind becomes a kind of moral imperative. So this whole drug issue is not an issue even about criminal syndicates or about untaxed billions, or about the mental health of our youth, or any of that malarkey. I mean,

God, the most destructive drug that's known to the species, is peddled on every street corner, without restriction. The real issue is what kind of mental world shall people inhabit? What kinds of hope shall be permitted? What kind of value systems shall be allowed? And the value systems that aggrandize the possession of things, the tearing up of the Earth, competition, classism, racism, sexism, have led us to the brink of catastrophe.

I think we have to abandon Western cultural values and return to the deeper wisdom of the body in connection with the plants. That's the seamless web that leads us back into the heart of nature—and if we can do this, then this very narrow neck of cultural crisis can be navigated. Very little of the past can be saved. The architectonics, the machines, the systems of monetary exchange and propaganda, the silly religions, the asinine aesthetic canons, very little of that can be saved. But what can be saved is the sense of love and caring, and mutuality, that we all put into and take from the human enterprise. You know, there's a Grateful Dead song that says, "You can't go back and you can't stand still. If the thunder don't get you, then the lightning will." And we now hold, through the possession of these psychedelics, catalysts for the human imagination of sufficient power that if we use them we can deconstruct the lethal vehicle that is carrying us toward the brink of apocalypse. We can deconstruct that vehicle and redesign it into a kind of starship that would carry us and our children out into the broad starry galaxy we know to be awaiting us.

But it's a cultural test. Nature is pitiless. Intelligence is a grand experiment upon which a great deal has been writ—but if it proves inadequate, nature will cover it over with the same kind of cool impunity that she covered over the dinosaurs and the trilobites and the crossopterygian fishes, and all those other folks that came before. So what we must do, I think, is see our future in the imagination. Catalyze the imagination. Form symbiotic relationships with the plants. Affirm archaic values. And spread the good news that what is out of control, what is in fact dying, is a world that had become too top-heavy with its own hubris, too bent by its own false value systems, and too dehumanized to care about what happens to its own children. So I say, good riddance to it! Bring on the archaic revival, and let's create a new world!

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Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 75 | October 2010. One day in the winter we stood in the Boston cold, him smoking cigarettes & throwing off poems. So damned nice a day.

Jim Burke III lives in Hartford, Connecticut. His most recent letter appeared in *Cenacle* | 72 | April 2010. To know a man whose mind & heart deepen with the years is a gift indeed.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry most recently appeared in *Cenacle* | 72 | April 2010. We sat together at a film about folksinger Phil Ochs, & agreed later it's better neither to burn out nor fade away.

Ralph Emerson lives in South Glastonbury, Connecticut. His most recent essay appeared in *Cenacle* | 73-74 | Summer 2010. He recently told me the letter R is one of his favorites, & I'm not one to disagree on this.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. It was a real delight to use the current technology to interview her across the ocean for this issue. Art will use any tools at hand to perpetuate. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in 1804 & died in 1864, living his life mostly in Salem, Massachusetts. His excellent short story in this issue was also re-published by Scriptor Press in 2000 as part of its Burning Man Books Series.

Terence McKenna was born in 1946 & grew up in Paonia, Colorado. He died in 2000 in Hawaii. Anyone enjoying his piece in this issue should try his book *Food of the Gods* to explore his challenging thinking further.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 76 | December 2010. Her website is <http://rollwiththechanges.org>. I am very happy to publish her fine work.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. He is an excellent writer in many forms & a welcome fellow participant at the Out Loud Open Mike (<http://www.outloudmike.com>). I look forward to knowing his large body of work, new & old, better over time.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. By dint of her will is this issue now complete, & its pictorial beauty arrives to you from her hands.

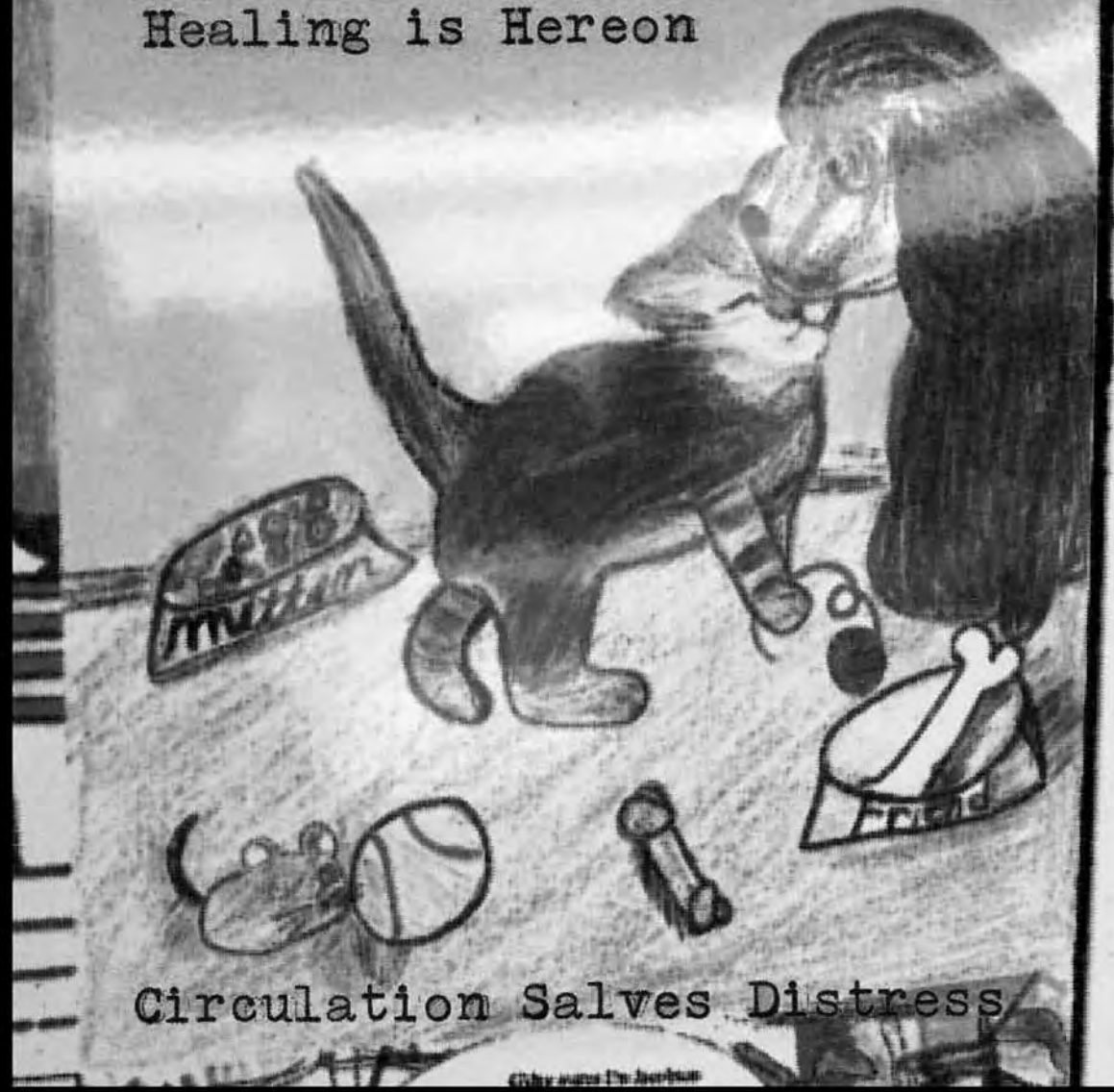
Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. When not complaining of his jobless state, his heart sometimes fills with gratitude for loved ones & empathy for the world's much-needless suffering.

Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Her writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 76 | December 2010. Still a somewhat new friend to me, & so mysterious, I nonetheless find her spirit a lively, appealing one, & her writing very fine.

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Healing is Hereon



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