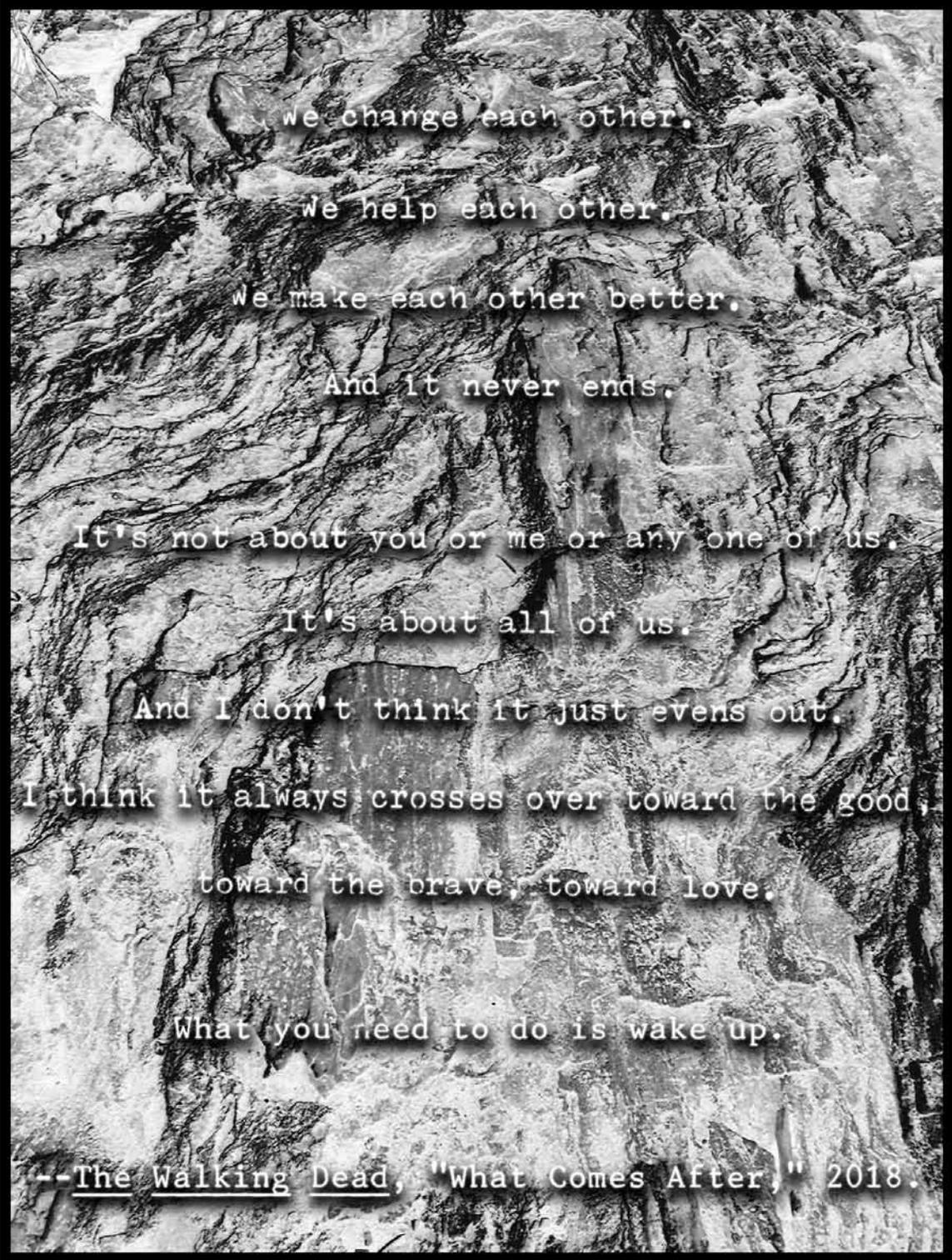


The Cenacle



NUMBER 109 | OCTOBER 2019



We change each other.

We help each other.

We make each other better.

And it never ends.

It's not about you or me or any one of us.

It's about all of us.

And I don't think it just evens out.

I think it always crosses over toward the good,
toward the brave, toward love.

What you need to do is wake up.

--The Walking Dead, "What Comes After," 2018.

October 31, 2019

5:06 p.m.

On board Hartford, CT
to Boston, MA

Greyhound bus

The traffic is moving swiftly along this highway to Boston. The bus I'm in is full to the last seat. I'm in the very back, next to a young fellow thumb-fucking his gadget. Most of the other passengers the same. I said hello to him when he sat down next to me. He smiled a "hello" in reply, & then he, thumb, & gadget got down to business.

It's a lovely grey, wet autumn day out there to see, speeding by. Lots of yellow-leaved trees, some orange.

I live in this world & yet little understand it. Why things grow & die. What love really is. Why writing with black pen & listening to music makes me so happy.

Who I am to various others I know in various ways. What memories of me people I ~~no~~ no longer know retain. Why I can't remember, fully,

fuck
trump

-31-

Thoroughly, vividly, every moment of my life. Who I would be if I could.

I don't understand impeachment, or the appeal of reality TV shows, or why some have so much & others so little.

I don't understand racism or sexism or a whole lot of other -isms. I can tell you what the words mean, by using other words, but I don't think that is understanding.

I love trees but do not know them as maybe I could. Likewise I love the ocean, & snow, the moon & stars.

I don't know why some songs are popular & others not. Why some TV shows get cancelled & others go on & on. Why I have rarely cried for all the sadness I feel for myself & my loved ones & the world.

I don't remember being born, & yet here I am. I don't remember many days of my life in detail, & so I write a lot of things down. But that's not quite the same. Human life isn't long enough to



-32-

know very much, & people live in their times & places & not others. I wished for years I had been 18 in 1968, living in San Francisco, in the heart of the psychedelic dream. But while I could have been there, no sure thing I would have been one of the happy hippies dancing in Golden Gate Park. Maybe I got busted on my way there. And I would be 69 years old now. What would that mean.

The Cenacle is full of good writing & provocative graphics. Its writers & artists are deep-thinking & deep-feeling people who I would guess are wondering a lot of these same things as their days go by.

That all said, then there's these.

I believe in Art.
I believe in kindness.
I believe in empathy.
I believe in love.
I believe all life matters.
I believe no suffering is necessary.

-33-

I love Art.

I love Nature.

I love the world.

I dance to music.

I love the contributors to this journal.

I love you, probably.

This bus is slowing down as it nears Boston, heavier traffic. I can't wait to see RD, since I've been gone three days now, writing a lot of what will be published in this issue, & editing the rest.

The heavy grey clouds above are beautifully textured, sacred shapes of water, make this beautiful blue-green planet of life possible. And the trees in every direction. And the earth this bus travels on. And you & me, & what we do happy & fearful with our days here moving around.

Even speeding slowly across the land, in a bus full of strangers, it's good to be home.

~~10/21/19~~



Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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Thank you to the many recruiters, friends, & others who have supported me whilst I job-hunted. Most of all, to KD for being her fine, funky self.



SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND
2019

Feedback on Cenacle 108 | June 2019

From Colin James:

Ace Boggess's poetry reminds me of the pile of shopping carts I discovered recently behind the local supermarket, stacked into a perfectly bent pyramid. Geometrically, I shall always remain in his debt.

* * * * *

From Ace Boggess:

Sam Knot's poem "Log" really moved me. It had a sort of Wallace Stevens feel to it, calling on memory, image, maybe a hint of allegory. "[T]he bird is a tiny undiscovered monkey" is one of those lines I read and thought about, wished I had written it, then thought about it some more. The poem has great flow, straddling a border between nostalgia and hope. Its consonance plays fun notes on the tongue. I loved everything about this poem.

* * * * *

From John Echem:

The imagery in "Log" uncorks Sam Knot's profound inventive turn of mind. His cleverness in describing the filming of birds in sunshine, among the branches of trees, and up above to the blue sky, transports me into the beauty of these inspiring bionomics!

* * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

Sam Knot's "Log" is a gift of experience in color and shape—"this fluid flash"—"the bird is a tiny undiscovered monkey." And the line in "That Witch" —"that which has no choice but to vibrate"—*just fabulous*.

The line in Martina's Newberry's poem "Morning on the Ugly Pond": "ill-favored old pond! Still, here we are"—*wonderful*—it reminds me of Ginsberg's gorgeous "Sunflower Sutra"—his homage to an aged, decrepit sunflower resplendent with inner grace.

Tamara Miles' "Same Moon Shining" passage about the neighbor's house—which "burned down while I stood, crying into my phone"—touched me immensely. So many events in my tumultuous area in Israel have found me crying into my phone, crying into the horizon, helpless but to cry.

And I relish the voices of Tamara Miles' and John Echem's poem "Two Seekers Drowned"—the swirl between dimensions—my own heart ripples.

The drama of Kassi Soulard's photos continue to haunt me even after I close the journal.

* * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

I love the heightened brevity and breadth of Judih Haggai's poems: a loon in darkness as the voice of my ancestor; yesterday held in empty water bottles; the way scent is captured, too, in the Jerusalem pines of my imagination. Morning embroidery, knees hugged to self on cushion. These ways of coping, of hearing, of being and knowing. Thank you, Judih!

* * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I always adore Judih Haggai's spare but fluorescent poetry, but there is one in this issue that is particularly striking for me. A loon calls in ancestral tones out of an adjacent yet primeval darkness; we are given the choice between having a pleasant day or drawing an intake of even one molecule of politics. Ideas flow through the noosphere, vibrate the morning's presence where

humans and birds dwell. Conifers in Jerusalem burn their life (we hope without combustion!), and the greatest principle in all the universe—compassion—liberates us from fear, and kindles the brotherhood and the sisterhood of all living beings.

Judih's poetry and its ideas flow well beyond their brevity, and bring along anyone who is inclined to resonate with it an inner peace and tranquility in the pointed awareness of a compassion that has no boundary. To liberate beings from suffering, and poetry from limits, are certainly admirable endeavors.

* * * * *

From Martina Newberry:

Sam Knot's dreamy "Log" is a painting with words. Each line pulls the reader further and further onto the canvas, into the scene. I loved the final lines (which turned me right back to the beginning of this lovely poem):

*♫ how many know who else might be
swinging through the trees of this
once-thought well-categorised country?
I suppose now I have proof
(?)*

*So let's lie here, in thrall to recording dreams
—you know—for a moment it seemed
I could remember almost
all those other times.*

Bravo, Sam Knot!

Raymond Soulard Jr.'s *Many Musics* is absolutely enthralling. First reading knocked me on my rear. These haunting images would not let me go:

*The Beast now lets me know him,
embraces me fully among his branches,
his buzzings, his Seas deep. His empty
canyons under full moons, his frozen rainbow
waterfalls, his spring rains.*

Raymond's work is a constant reminder to me that:

*Men are contrived from music &
air as much as Creatures.*

The continuation of Charlie Beyer's "The Crocodile King of Belize" is so welcomed! I'm excited to read the next segment. Such powerful writing! Thank you, Charlie!

* * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

I like that in Martina Newberry's poem "Sadie Sings to Her City," she paints Los Angeles as a personality whose only "social contract" is to give freedom and opportunity to "failed tradition . . . [and] expectation." All great cities have personalities, but few with such vigor as to be the vanguard of social non-conformity.

Kassandra Soulard creates wonderful visual textures throughout the pages of the new issue. Political words, marvelous stone, weird landscapes, enhanced nature, and the patterns we pass unknowing. Every picture makes me ask myself: *What is next? Why?* They keep you off balance. Good work!

And I am beside myself with thanks to Leia Friedman for her "The Island of Bali: The Sacred Dances With The Profane, By Firelight" (*Cenacle* 107 | April 107)—for taking me there and exposing in such a clear and fascinating way what I had feared to be true for so much of the world. Cultures of flowers replaced by the "new deity, the dirty dollar." I see master craft writing in the juxtaposition of actual dancers, narrow streets, and towering temples, with the reality of a million Bermuda shorts-wearing latte-seeking visitors. I so enjoyed her transport into the dance itself—becoming one with the land and history—only to awake to a Walmart world—and the whitewashing of indigenous culture. Quality work, Leia. I want to see much more.

* * * * *

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

Colin James's poems are, as ever, carefully-crafted dressers whose drawers contain labyrinths. Once you enter a James poem, you never know where you're going to end up.

Tamara Miles guides us through the ongoing excavation of the labyrinth of her family history. "The greatest mystery we are faced with," she writes, "is the mystery of ourselves. What twists and turns our lives make, what choices the stranger in the mirror makes." Her family members are connected to her across time and space. *How much of her is them?* she wonders. Their stories are her story. There's a lot of damage in this short text: two murders, a car crash, asphyxiation, brain damage, a house fire that kills a mother and a baby. The memoir is a poem, associative: the breaking apart of a family is compared to the mysterious 1908 Tunguska explosion. Injured in a car crash, Miles's father struggles against gravity to find help, then works for an aircraft company that defies gravity. Though we may be in a labyrinth of personal histories, it never feels claustrophobic, but continually opens out onto other stories, onto other vistas, and onto the clear, cool light of the present.

In his continuing narrative, "The Crocodile King of Belize," Charlie Beyer guides us once again into that quirky swamp planet where the worlds of Caribbean blacks, indigenous Mayas, and imported whites overlap. The jungle mud

proves fertile ground for culture clashes. I suspect the worst of them is yet to come. A newspaper clipping accompanying his text cued me in to the fact that his narrative is based on a true story; it is historical fiction, one might say.

In "How Far Would You Go To Stop That Crazy Craving?," Ace Boggess's poetic imagination sails from the back of a box of breakfast cereal to Odysseus, tied up, listening to the song of the sirens. And, because it's a Boggess poem, each word pulls twice its weight, like a sailor hauling on his oar, and the poem plunges forward, light in the water.

Sam Knot, gracing these pages for the first time, gives us Celtic knot-works of language, poetic weavings where blue tit bends over into undiscovered monkey, and witch flows into airplane.

Tom Sheehan writes about bathing his father in a poem like a musical composition of explosions, the nearness of death soaking the scene in intense colors, like fall itself.

Martina Newberry busts out a gritty and potent ode to Los Angeles, culminating in the unity of the poet and her city. I photographed the poem in the magazine, and posted it, attributed to her, on Instagram, and a random person wrote, "I love this so much."

* * * * *



From Sam Knot:

Re: Tamara Miles's & John Echem's "Two Seekers Drowned in the Rio Grande":

*These two voices
A stage in my mind (Development?)
Perhaps an infinite plane
—sometimes whisper, sometimes howl—
Like wind (That natural).*

*Trailing clothes of blue-grey smoke
As they weave around each other
Delivering lines that sometimes
Crystallise into modern humans
Looking at their phones, or
Projecting themselves through windows
Imagining who the speaker might be.*

*I keep coming back to earth
Regarding us from outside
As one multiplicitous psyche
Whose poetry sings quietly
When we are alone
together.*

On Cassandra Soulard's photo leading me from my own poetry:

"Sheer"

*I have dropped like the proverbial penny
well enough to wonder what use has money
(but to picture beautifully the faces of our ruling
wishes)
at the bottom of this sheer drop. Drop. Thinking of
wishing wells while in a desert of some sort—
a black & white window onto a varicoloured sky.*

& over the page:

*It might be the roof of a cave, where some creature
reached out to touch the still wet clay-paint
& it took a million years or more to dry
& for us humans to drip up from it, observe this
being of spongy meanings, this permeable
photographic membrane—it is almost unlike*

*a trace—as if in fact there is someone, still,
on the other side . . .*

*The camera projecting a light writing
onto each theatrical face, from which flows
infinite expressive friezes.*

In Nathan D. Horowitz's Night Mind:

*Oh my God!
Ancient Goddesses
write writhing snake
writing through you
to wonder witch of us
struck melted gold
in chancing a sun touch
like the moon turns rhyme
reflectively into
a deeper question—
a deeper question
with nothing behind it
but the massive meat
of the person asking
the everything of flesh
if a word can rhyme
with itself, or if that
can only be rhythm
why each strike
seems a little different
flesh flesh flesh
& if words can point
to signs like the moon's
light leaping spiral fingers
then what does rhyme
point to? what is the sign
of rhyme? what is
the meaning of this?
That now
everything seems
to rhyme, besides
the sounds we are making
a greater music—
my god, my friend
The snakes
are writhing
around your arms!
IS THIS POETRY!*

Re: Tom Sheehan “A Small Red Star For Me and My Father”:

“Syzygy.”

*I know I climbed a mountain in this poem
I know there was, is, pain, I can't quite tell
whose wounds they are? There is a word here
for us, one we know, but perhaps not as well
as we could. It is a gift from the poet
that was a gift to the poet. Yoked together.
The most surprising thing for me is how it refers
in fact at least to three. Like there is always
one thing I tend to forget, I assume
it is one's own position. So easy, & yet
impossible to overlook.*

& then I found another verse, over the page.

* * *

Re: Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s *Many Musics*:

*We have been on a journey then
& now again, each other's strange familiars,
warm furry memories, rainbow realities,
sweet loves, & sweeter sads, & the secret
non-weakness of sleep, the restorative price,
these little gems of logic most overlook
with eyes like stones, at least
being so heavy, poised to fall into
our soft seeming uselessness,
humming & hissing, whispering
with great clarity, it is okay my love
we are this bed of snakes that we
lie in, & they are different to us
as the slow dawn we say is breaking
—the very same sense in which
we speak that tough word soft
—the brittle indeed do flex.*

*I know of nothing
in the world of writing
so demanding as the reward
you didn't realise you were
asking for.
Asking for words to be something
more
like they ever were*

*like this semi-circle
of curious friends, leaning in
to sniff up the fresh breath
of this forest that surrounds us
& all its secrets going in & out
your mouth, your work,
your nostrils, the eyes of life
as holy open as our
revelatory ears tingling
precisely tuned to these, to this
Many Musics.*

* * *

Re: Martina Newberry's “Sadie Sings to Her City”:

*I didn't know this city
until it walked up to me
like a person, & I felt maybe
I read them right away
from, or in, the poetry
of their approach*

*& now I realise she kept on
walking right into me
& I am so pleased to know
poetry is a bustling street
again*

*BEEP BEEP
HOOONNK!*

* * *

Re: Colin James's “A Few Slightly Tricky Elucidated Areas of Incompatibility”:

*One Mister Allman
is permanently relocating
The Expressive Possibilities
of carrying, like a snail,
One's Own Portal Home?*

*Was this Cheshire Cat's grin
the first & last thing
to disappear, that time
rhetoric really Questioned.*

*I'm not sure? But I sure can
put one foot in front the other.
In front the Other, the portal,
emphatically, who
?*

I don't know either, or, as well.

Re: Ace Boggess's "What Could Be More Wonderful?":

*Maybe in the end
serenity effects
the conquest of perfection.
Flawlessly?*

Re: Gregory Kelly's poetry:

*TUNING IN
TO THE RHYTHM
IN THESE
ARRANGEMENTS*

COMING TO LIFE

RECOGNITION

OF MY OWN

*MOMENT
QUEST*

*I
O
N
S*

*IN YOUR
WORD
REFLECTIONS*

*HUMANE
CONDITIONS
OF POSSIBILITY*

Re: Jimmy Heffernan's "Fleeting":

*↳ mean is another word
for average, which
no life is. Not magic
but the ordinary
The True Illusion!*

*It seems
that meaning must be
married, happily
to everyday reality*

*whose smile
is a crown
on which the sun keeps picking*

NEW GEMS OUT

Re: Joe Ciccone's poetry:

*2 very storied poems
the first, just fun, a pun
but where it ends
the second continues
A RESOLUTION*

so nice to find a song in the battle



From the ElectroLounge Forums

Post a Poem You Like!

Published on electrolounge.boards.net.

Post by Jimmy on Aug 4, 2018 at 12:52am

[Untitled]

by Emily Dickinson

I'm nobody! Who are you?
 Are you nobody, too?
 Then there's a pair of us—don't tell!
 They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!
 How public, like a frog
 To tell your name the livelong day
 To an admiring bog!

* * *

Post by Raymond on Aug 4, 2018 at 7:53am

Emily D is a rock star poet in a galaxy of her own!

* * *

Post by KD on Aug 11, 2018 at 7:37pm

Seeker of Truth

by E.E. Cummings

seeker of truth

follow no path
 all paths lead where

truth is here

* * *

Post by Raymond on Aug 11, 2018 at 8:39pm

That's a really cool one, KD. You'll know this one too:

The Way Things Work

by Jorie Graham

is by admitting
 or opening away.
 This is the simplest form
 of current: Blue
 moving through blue;
 blue through purple;
 the objects of desire
 opening upon themselves
 without us; the objects of faith.
 The way things work
 is by solution,
 resistance lessened or
 increased and taken
 advantage of.
 The way things work
 is that we finally believe
 they are there,
 common and able
 to illustrate themselves.
 Wheel, kinetic flow,
 rising and falling water,
 ingots, levers and keys,
 I believe in you,
 cylinder lock, pulley,
 lifting tackle and
 crane lift your small head—
 I believe in you—
 your head is the horizon to
 my hand. I believe
 forever in the hooks.
 The way things work
 is that eventually
 something catches.

* * *

Post by Jimmy on Aug 22, 2018 at 10:39pm

He who once promised much

by F.W. Nietzsche

He who once promised much
Is silent in himself.
He who once ignited lightning
Must long—be a cloud.

Higher men

by F.W. Nietzsche

He climbs up—you must praise him!
But this one comes from above!
He is relieved of praise,
He is from above!

* * *

Post by Raymond on Aug 23, 2018 at 10:12am

Didn't know he wrote poems. Strange little things!

* * *

Post by Jimmy on Aug 23, 2018 at 4:32pm

Yes, indeed, there is a book called *The Peacock and the Buffalo* that came out a few years ago, with Nietzsche's collected poems. They're not great but pretty good, but valuable insofar as they give tremendous insight into his philosophy that maybe is hard to glean from some of his writings. I enjoy the book immensely mainly for that reason.

* * *

Post by Jimmy on Sep 18, 2018 at 8:51pm

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

by Lord Byron

There is the moral of all human tales;
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past.
First freedom and then Glory—when that fails;
Wealth, vice, corruption,—barbarism at last.

* * *

Post by KD on Sep 29, 2018 at 10:43pm

I have not read much Lord Byron, Jimmy—but I think he's spot on with that stanza!

Here's one that I've always liked:

The Peace of Wild Things

by Wendell Berry

When despair grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

* * *

Post by Jimmy on Oct 8, 2018 at 9:00pm

A Ballad of Dreamland

by Algernon Charles Swinburne

I hid my heart in a nest of roses,
Out of the sun's way, hidden apart;
In a softer bed than the soft white snow's is,
Under the roses I hid my heart.
Why would it sleep not? why should it start,
When never a leaf of the rose-tree stirred?
What made sleep flutter his wings and part?
Only the song of a secret bird.

Lie still, I said, for the wind's wing closes,
And mild leaves muffle the keen sun's dart;
Lie still, for the wind of the warm sea dozes,
And the wind is unquieter yet than thou art.
Does a thought in thee still as a thorn's wound smart?
Does the fang still fret thee of hope deferred?
What bids the lids of thy sleep dispart?
Only the song of a secret bird.

The green land's name that a charm encloses,
 It never was writ in the traveller's chart,
 And sweet as the fruit on its tree that grows is,
 It never was sold in the merchant's mart.
 The swallows of dreams through its dim fields dart,
 And sleep's are the tunes in its tree tops heard;
 No hound's note wakens the wildwood hart,
 Only the song of a secret bird.

ENVOI.

In the world of dreams I have chosen my part,
 To sleep for a season and hear no word
 Of true love's truth or of light love's art,
 Only the song of a secret bird.

* * *

Post by KD on Oct 13, 2018 at 8:23am

I have never heard of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Jimmy! But he's good; and, reading about him, he sounds like a pretty fascinating character.

I've been thinking about Adrienne Rich, and "A Ballad of Dreamland" made me think especially about this one:

Integrity

by Adrienne Rich

the quality of being complete; unbroken condition; entirety
 —Webster

A wild patience has taken me this far

as if I had to bring to shore
 a boat with a spasmodic outboard motor
 old sweaters, nets, spray-mottled books
 tossed in the prow
 some kind of sun burning my shoulder-blades.
 Splashing the oarlocks. Burning through.
 Your fore-arms can get scalded, licked with pain
 in a sun blotted like unspoken anger
 behind a casual mist.

The length of daylight
 this far north, in this
 forty-ninth year of my life
 is critical.

The light is critical: of me, of this
 long-dreamed, involuntary landing
 on the arm of an inland sea.
 The glitter of the shoal
 depleting into shadow
 I recognize: the stand of pines
 violet-black really, green in the old postcard
 but really I have nothing but myself
 to go by; nothing
 stands in the realm of pure necessity
 except what my hands can hold.

Nothing but myself? . . . My selves.
 After so long, this answer.
 As if I had always known
 I steer the boat in, simply.
 The motor dying on the pebbles
 cicadas taking up the hum
 dropped in the silence.

Anger and tenderness: my selves.
 And now I can believe they breathe in me
 as angels, not polarities.
 Anger and tenderness: the spider's genius
 to spin and weave in the same action
 from her own body, anywhere—
 even from a broken web.

The cabin in the stand of pines
 is still for sale. I know this. Know the print
 of the last foot, the hand that slammed and locked the door,
 then stopped to wreath the rain-smashed clematis
 back on the trellis
 for no one's sake except its own.
 I know the chart nailed to the wallboards
 the icy kettle squatting on the burner.
 The hands that hammered in those nails
 emptied that kettle one last time
 are these two hands
 and they have caught the baby leaping
 from between trembling legs
 and they have worked the vacuum aspirator
 and stroked the sweated temples
 and steered the boat there through this hot
 misblotted sunlight, critical light
 imperceptibly scalding
 the skin these hands will also salve.

* * * * *

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, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) 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, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Job Hunting Journal

August 1, 2019

Milkrose, Massachusetts (MA)

It was July 24, the day of Robert Mueller’s testimony to Congress about his report detailing Trump’s collusion with Russia to steal the 2016 U.S. presidential election—

Came an email for me to call into a meeting with Human Resources (HR) & a big shot at my employer, XXX in Boston—

I’d dreaded it was sometime coming—this layoff—The current owners of XXX, a holding company, had been shedding costs every which way for a rumored sale—technical writers like me don’t survive recessions (2008) or company sales (2019) with their jobs intact—

The call was 30 minutes, sad, almost embarrassing. I’d done nothing wrong—just one of many victims of greed—7 years there, building out my role & work—done—

Since then, after quickly emailing long-time colleagues goodbye (my work email was shut off barely an hour after that meeting), I’ve been adjusting to unemployment—lotta paperwork, lotta people saying kind things—

But how I felt summed the other day when I had to travel to the XXX Boston office to drop off things & collect my possessions. Couple hours at most in a room, going through old papers, oddities, countless reminders of this & that moment—

Coming out of the building, back exit, closest to train, come out this way a million times, tripped, crashed, hard, banged my cheek, arm, bent my glasses. Blood all over the ground. Two trips back inside to the men’s room before blood coagulated. An Uber driver consoling my sorry self on trip home. KD

patching me up.

Now, over a week in, cohering more from that low moment. Going to the Museum of Fine Arts tonight, one of my favorite places in the world. Tomorrow do my radio show, see with KD new film *IT*, & write hours away in Boston.

I'll try to add more to this soon. Jobs take awhile to get, likely even in Trump's Weird New Amerika.



* * *

August 10, 2019
Milkrose, MA

I've been trying to figure about how this layoff can be about gain, not loss—I'd stopped feeling safe & proud of my workplace a couple of years ago—it changed so much, grew bigger & more corporate & less humane for everyone there—it was the paycheck that kept me—I learned how to do my technical writer profession well there, but I need a better place to do it—

What I do is about figuring out the people, tools, & processes of a company that will help me to do my work there best I can—I've put in the years to get good at this—I need a job hunt that is not done with fear & desperation—I can & will do better—it's on me to do this—presenting a coherent picture of who I am, & what I can do for prospective employers—

LinkedIn.com helped a lot in recent days—I got some calls, set up some phone interviews, now I have a very promising in-person interview in Boston next Wednesday—small tech company, develops metrics for e-commerce companies to help them know their marketplaces better—I would build their internal & external training documentation program—very, very luring work—Since we were in downtown Boston yesterday (Saturday), KD & I walked by the skyscraper this company is in somewheres—her good vibes will linger there for me when I go back there on Wednesday—

And yet will be sending out more resumes & emails & applications until then—never can slow in this hunt, not till a victory—*push, push*, lots of phone calls, waiting, impatience—so weird that seven years of daily work ended in a day, a Wednesday too, & all the days since living elsewhere than before—

* * *

August 14, 2019
Milkrose, MA

Today I have my first in-person job interview in Boston, 3 weeks to the day after I was laid off. Taken me this long to get to this step. The interview is for that tech company, engaged in developing data metrics for “e-commerce,” which is what we all do when we shop online at Amazon or elsewhere. If hired, I will create their training documentation program, for their employees and for their customers. It’s the kind of job that my previous ones have readied me for, to take on bigger reins and make something really good.



Right now I’m in my reading mode for this interview, which is at 2 pm. Reading the morning news, eating cereal, waking up. KD is already out to her day, doctor’s appointment, then to work.

Shortly, I am going to spend the rest of the morning researching this company further, its leading employees, its products. I intend to show up with more information than I could possibly need, just in case. Show up with writing samples from past jobs, with resumes printed on nice paper. With me scrubbed and trimmed and dressed neatly, but not too formally. It is not a formal company.

The hardest part is not this prep, nor even the interview. It’s the moments after leaving, all hyped up and ready to be employed again, but not. Not yet. And no real assurances will come today. Smiles, handshakes, faces put to what are now just names and voices. But no job. Knowing I have to resume the hunt, more emails, more calls, more interviews like today’s, until the dam breaks, and success is had.

Here I go again, 3 weeks along this, and counting.

This journal is something I’m compelling myself to write & publish since job hunting is kind of a shitty way to spend one’s days, and tends to close one up. I’m trying to keep my doors open.

* * *

August 28, 2019
Milkrose, MA

Been a month of job-hunting, & I think I'm close to a new job, not yet, but close, & I think I need patience & persistence more than ever.

*** Job possible #1 - willing to pay me for a "test" project, & more if that goes well, not my preference, but it's by a hair in the lead now.

*** Job possible #2 - good on-site interview, HR person on my side, told me my interview "excited" the team. Offer not made yet, but seems close. This is the one I want.

*** Job possible #3 - on-site interview this week.

*** Others - waiting phone calls, emails, or just the usual silence every job-hunter faces sooner or later.

Mulling. Two months of this summer, & half of it trying to find a new job. Maybe close to finding one. Seems & feels that way—

Only one path forward will occur, of the many possibles right now. Little prescient of what to come, yet it's funny how I've found myself preparing more or less for one interview or another, as each holds greater or lesser appeal—

It was seven years ago, in the summer, the last time I was job-hunting, with fewer possibles because of a crashed economy, but also with a less impressive resume to show—

Now different for both of these. I get consideration more often, & more seriously. I was laid off by one employer, & others have nosed forward, seem to value what another discarded—It's all nice enough but, meanwhile, no actual paycheck coming right now.

Have to smile friendly.

Talk smart yet humble.

Exude appeal as I am able.

Move through the mystery of what connects one to another special.

It's not arbitrary, how what happens, happens. Humans make deeply emotive choices, foundation to rationale, to practicality, to possibility—There are gone faces I would like to talk about this with—writing places I'd like to be at again with my pens & notebooks, & this new-old puzzle.

I would like to believe I bring good to the table. An intelligence, humor, patience, curiosity. Some still golden spark of youth. An abiding wish to learn how to do better.

I had a paycheck at my last job, but the joy, the sense of belonging, of mattering, diminished over time. Yet I caught a deep taste for the idea of building good processes for producing good work. I cared about my pay-job in a way not dissimilar to my writing & press-work.

The work mattered even as the workplace filled with poison. Greed, indifference. So many good people shown the door in hardly a few hours of a single day. It seemed, in the end, that the work I did was valuable, & needed, & yet paying me to do it was not.

Nothing about human behavior is completely predictable, & clinging too much to theories & patterns & tendencies is sure to produce failure at some point. It's dangerous to be too sure of desire, its much,

its lack.

Maybe better to insist a patience within to let the tumblers fall & click into place, & then decide, & then nod. Not knowing fully, never will know fully, & yet have to act—words, movements—have to cohere along, like wings on breeze—

*What matters is
what you create
who you love
what you gift the world
what you teach
how you listen
how wide open your hands
your eyes your mind*

*how you seek & love beauty
how you tend & protect*

*who you let near you
what you let near you
why you open & close*

*I don't know big sure answers, but I do know kindness matters,
however received*

smiles matter, touch matters

*music matters so much
Learning is good
Remembering matters
The known & the novel are
equivalently important*

*harm to body ≈
harm to mind*

*love to body ≈
love to mind*

I do not understand my value to others but feel it occur, usually with an inner start—

The world does not end if you or I stop caring. But it is at least different, maybe lesser—

I believe this world is beautiful & worth saving from the bastards who'd chew & swallow it till nothing left—

I believe in hope tho I do not always feel it. Yet it returns, in countless moments.

Will I have the most wanted job on my list above soon? I hope so. I hope so.

Good ganja.
Good shrooms.
Good world, or mostly trying.
Good night.

* * *

September 8, 2019
 Milkrose, MA

Most promising job fell through at the last minute—after a whole week of waiting for a reply—pissed off at them for misleading me—but more at myself—days of no contact sniffed wrong, but I hung on—

So start in anew on Monday—& the lesson: *surrender nothing to anyone until offer is made*—twice now I've assumed too much & gotten burned—

It's a professional transaction—job hunting / hiring—as much as it seems super personal to me—to others, it is a matter of qualifications & budget—to anticipate the daily complex collaborative human relations to come seems—risky—because focus should be:

Can I do the work?
Can you pay me what my work is worth?

The rest is secondary. It starts with these. Location, kind of company, etc., matter, but it's a business transaction.

Yet I'm not convinced that the intangibles don't matter. It's just hard to quantify their effect.

I just want this over. That's on me. Until it's successfully completed, this is what I do during pay-job hours. I've got to do this shit better.

* * *

October 1, 2019
 Milkrose, MA

Early September resumed the hunt after that I'd say third major chance fell through. Oddly, a place I'd cancelled an interview with—thinking I had a job in hand—proved willing to bring me in to talk.

Waiting for that day, I sent out a whole new horde of resumes, even took a lot of feedback I'd gotten from different sources and made a new version.

Updated my job tracker, kept going. Kept writing, kept working on the very overdue *Cenacle* 108 till it was finished & distributed in print & online, but for a few stray promotions needed. Trying to find a rhythm to this effort, this work of a weird kind.

Early on in job hunt, I did not slow down, but then I did when success, seeming success, started, & so my momentum was reluctant & sluggish.

This work—I know that’s what it is, yet I’m slow to respect it—

A football coach I admire says, “Focus on the process, not the results,” & I can kind of see this. A belief that good process brings good results—yet it feels, all this, too much like a helpless free fall, hands grasping wildly for anything to hold onto—I need to slow & cool my continuous panic—make more of these days, as valuable as all others—

So the day of that next interview came—I micro-dosed half a gram—to calm, to focus—the day was overcast & cool as I walked to the train to ride me into Boston—the pay on this job was low, yet I went in, spent two hours at this business, several successive interviews—one by phone—did my best, came out feeling like I always do after a big interview with no resolution—down, spent, low—

Then autumn was arrived—KD’s & my favorite time of the year—& we drove up to Maine, to Mt. Desert Island, & a little cabin we stay in annually by an ocean cove, for a long weekend—it was reserved by us months before I was laid off—so we went—funny is that I had two job interviews by phone the Monday we were returning—so stayed the night in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, & I did the calls in our hotel room—one was OK, but no real great feeling about it—the other was just WOW—the best one so far—this second one led immediately to offer of an interview in person—which occurred yesterday—I spent days readying for it—including creating a 30-minute presentation about my background & qualifications—I even got a phone coaching prep session from their HR guy—

KD & I spent Sunday finalizing my presentation & did two full rehearsals. Making notes. Laying out my clothes, including my Jackson Pollock tie—

Wondering as I again rode the train into Boston—again half a gram to focus—*what have I learned from this? Anything? That’s it’s unbelievably tiring & debilitating? That getting this over with is my single goal? That every interview is an audition that drains me so much & yet leaves the interviewers-so-far fairly indifferent?* I come, I shake ass, sometimes for hours, shake hands, leave. And that’s it. Maybe get a “no thank you note,” if lucky.

Yet this place was amazing. Friendly, honestly so. Loved my presentation. Wanted to know me as a person. Shared lunch with me. Felt like a tribal software company, wanting to know if I fit in as a person as well as a colleague. It was six hours of this, & I came out feeling elated & downtrodden. THIS MORE THAN ANY OF THE OTHERS IS THE JOB I WANT. THE PEOPLE I WANT TO WORK WITH.

Told it would be a couple of days to know. Today was a sucking of waiting.

PLEASE. SAY YES.

* * *

October 4, 2019
Milkrose, MA

This is what they wrote to me yesterday morning:

Hi Raymond,

Thank you for your interest in YYY! The team loved meeting with you and we are very appreciative of all the time and effort you put into our process. Unfortunately, the hiring team has decided not to move forward with your candidacy at this time.

Please feel free to keep in touch and reach out again in the future. You can connect with us on LinkedIn, Twitter, and AngelList.

We appreciate your time and consideration, and wish you the best of luck with your search.

Take care,
XYXY

And this is how I responded this morning:

Hello XYXY,

It's taken me the day to sort out my reaction to this very short, perfunctory-sounding note. I have a few things to say to you as well, before this concludes.

While I found the people at YYY very friendly, and engaged in the hiring process, it became clear to me over the course of the day that few knew what technical writers do. There was very little definition given to the range and scope of the position, and I saw very little understanding of how product documentation is created. I provided all the information I could, but a short presentation and some Q-and-A sessions does not substitute for knowing the process first hand. In fact, at one point I was told flat out that "90% of the people at YYY had never worked with a technical writer."

This is something I have encountered before, in new-ish companies who have never hired a technical writer before, and I am willing to work with it. I'm very good at what I do; as importantly, I'm very good at explaining what I do, how I do it, and on what kind of timeline, to others. I'm good at collaborating, and making sure the results produced from my work are excellent ones. This is the result of years in my profession. I care a whole lot. I made all of this very clear during the course of that day.

So to imply that the team found me to be a nice, sincere person, but not one worth hiring, as your note does, offends me. But more than that, it makes me sad. Many of the YYY people I talked to seemed like intelligent, sweet, caring people, and no doubt good at their own jobs. But they should not really have been deciding on this position.

When I am asked questions like: "What would you do, if you were working away, and a bunch of your colleagues were trying to drag you off to Whiskey Wednesday?"—red flags go off for me. This is not a professional question. It does not help your company to hire someone who will do the job well. It makes the whole process seem more like a hazing to join a gang.

Technical writing is very important, crucial to a company's successful growth. I do it well. That's what matters. The fact that I am a nice person is great too, but it speaks nothing to my competence.

I spent hours and hours getting ready to come in. What I found was a company that does not really know what it wants, and rejected me on this basis. Not because I cannot do the work, and do it very

well, but because your people don't know the work itself.

Telling me I'm a nice guy, and that it's great I spent so much time preparing, but I'm not good enough, and giving me no reasons, just reinforces that nobody there took the time to research what the position actually does, what technical writing is. People showed up and winged it.

I'm going to CC this to the head of your company, to assure that its concerns are read. I am taking the time to do this because I spent yesterday feeling like I had been rejected in trying to join the cool kids' club, rather than deemed not qualified on any professional basis.

The truth is, based on this short note you sent, your company wasted a lot of my time, time I don't have right now, as I am looking for a new position—not worrying much at all about Whiskey Wednesday, and whether I “fit in” somehow with people I barely know. I left high school a long time ago.

It's great to be liked at work, and for people working together to feel close, and part of a good mission like YYY's. But nobody really cares for the guy who doesn't know what he is doing at his job, no matter how nice he is.

My wife said to me, “It's their loss.” I think, in truth, the loss belongs to all of us.

— Raymond Soulard, Jr.

* * *

Then a day or so later this came:

Hi Raymond –

Nice to meet you over email. I am the Chief Business Officer at YYY and having a good recruiting experience is of utmost importance to our team.

First, I want to apologize about the short communication at the end of the interview process. I know it takes a lot to prepare for our interviews and a full day out of your schedule. Based on your feedback, we are going to regroup internally about our feedback process / next steps after an onsite interview. I know how long it takes to prepare for the interviews and we should give more information in our process. Our hire rate is less than 1% of applicants and making it onsite puts you in the top 10% of candidates and is still a competitive process.

Second, we are not a cool kids club or anything close to that. In reality we are the opposite in terms of our inclusive and diverse culture focused on learning and creating world changing YYY products and services. YXYX and I will be working on that and sincerely apologize that your experience did not reflect the reality of our team.

And finally, I am traveling currently but will be back in the office on Wednesday. If you have time in the afternoon on Weds i would love to have a call and can provide more concrete feedback from the team and would love to hear more of your thoughts.

Best wishes,
YZYZ

And this is how I responded to this one:

Thank you for taking the time to write me. And I do believe that your company strives for excellence in all things. But, on the day I came in, it was obvious to me that I knew a lot more about technical writing than the folks who interviewed me. I've done the kind of world-class work I was told you are seeking. They know well their roles, and the company, and its products, but I know my profession.

But, simply put, I cannot describe in complete detail to such interviewers a process that is brand new to a company, involving products that are essentially still being developed. I chose to focus on what I had done in the past, as a sort of rough example. I emphasized in my presentation that what YYY needs is its own process, built solidly from the ground up, and I felt, and feel, quite up to the challenge to build it. I concluded with a plan of action to emphasize that my focus was not on the past, and other companies, but on how to do what YYY needs.

There were a few questions along the way I was asked that I could not answer definitively. Perhaps these were the deal-breakers; I don't know. But I do know that I have worked at many companies where I came in not knowing every last answer, or came upon questions I did not anticipate once there, and I used existing company knowledge and materials to learn what I needed to do the work excellently. It's part of the process. I learn the company and, in turn, the company learns what benefits there are in having a technical writer on staff.

Saying I am part of 1% or 10% sounds impressive, and thank you. But I know I do excellent work. There is no lesser standard for me. I know I am a kind and curious and empathetic co-worker and person. You were right to bring me in, and spend the time needed to talk to me.

But none of that means anything, ultimately. A decision was made, and I was informed about it. I was quite upset at how I was told, and let it be known. Regrettably, I moved on.

Unless there is more to say about my candidacy, a willingness to have further conversations that continue to take me seriously for this role, perhaps with you and possibly the others on this email, then I have spent enough time on this. A phone call is not going to convince me that I could not take on the role and do it at a world-class level. A phone call will not convince me that the interview day I went through was a valid assessment that should have ended as it did, with a brief rejection notice the next morning.

Had I been given the chance to work for YYY, I would have come in every day to do the kind of work to confirm to everyone there that it was a great idea to have hired me. And I would have strived always to be the kind of good, kindly colleague that my interviewers obviously wanted. I left your company site that day thinking how lucky I would be, if asked to join your company, and its laudable and critical mission.

I could not sleep that night for that wishing. Perhaps that is why that note hit me so hard. And caused me to write my reply, and now this one. When I said in my presentation that working for YYY would make me happy deep down in my heart, I meant it. I mean it still. It just seems like a great fit to me, from all sides.

If, after reading this note, you wish to still talk, then please let me know. If not, then let's just wish each other well, OK?

Peace,
Raymond

* * *

October 18, 2019

On board Boston-to-Milkrose MBTA Train

Another week of it has passed by, & now the compulsory & probably merciful break of the weekend. And this weekend a lot of hours working at *Cenacle* 109. Writing, typing, reading. First *Cenacle* since layoff, & also first since *Cenacle* | 81 | June 2012 that I've not been at that job; been *that* who.

An interview this past Wednesday for a Sr. Technical Writer position in ZombieTown, where I lived poor in the '90s, first working at a bookstore, then as a graduate student. Company in the downtown of this sprawling multi-racial working class city. Looking through conference room window to the main drag, stores I'd frequented when younger & shaggier & trippier. Weird, good times, though often broke & lonely. I wrote & wrote & wrote. Spent 3 hours doing the usual ass-shake for work. Company makes specialty surgery devices & tools.

Also been required to go several times of late to a career center, fill out paperwork; keeps the weekly jobless checks rolling in while I shake ass without victory yet.

Monday another in-person interview in another part of the metropolis. Another several hours auditioning for strangers, summing me toward that yay or nay. Seventh company to bring me in. Tiring. Fuckass tiring. A bad way to do all this. Humiliating to the spirit, impoverishing to one's hopes.

Yet, funny this, my only lesson from all this is: *even when employed, never stop looking*. Shit happens. Companies, situations within them, can change anytime, & so self-protection means working the job happily found, & yet allowing other chances to hover nearby. Things change.

A weekend of *Cenacle* 109 work, happily. Shirt & tie & the show must go on, come Monday. Still. Again.

* * *

October 31, 2019

On board Hartford, CT-to-Boston, MA Greyhound Bus

Past couple of weeks it seemed like I was getting closer & closer, arriving at the desired end of the process.

Yet days passed & not quite yet, not quite

Since my job hunt began on July 24, the day XXX laid me off, the day of Robert Mueller's testimony to Congress about how Trump knew of & took advantage of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, I've been kind of tracking Trump's downfall from there to my attempt to rise again. He's now being impeached because of an extortion call he had with Ukraine a day after that hearing; a call to leverage aid to that struggling U.S. ally against their agreement to investigate one of Trump's possible 2020 opponents, former Vice President Joe Biden.

Trump is getting impeached over this. He did it to himself. I caused no reason for my layoff.

I began recently to pair the current political question—"what will life be like after Donald Trump?"—with my own question—"what will it be like to be employed again?"

Depends on the company, of course, the commute, how easy or hard to acclimate to the work.

*But this: XXX wore me the fuck down &
how not to have this happen again—
Friends peeled away—
My writing suffered—Hope waned—
KD rode through all this with me—*

Days of emails & phone calls & on-site interviews. Went to the career center as required & learned more about LinkedIn. It felt useful, but for later, when I find a way to keep myself from lodging in my own sediment, from assuming too much about my new job's solid, ongoing ground. I hope to stay where I land, but not cut off from the rest of the working world as I did. It's a hard way to be, but no other choice. Above all, I do not intend to be jobless like this again.

A few leads started to cohere, as I moved from HR phone screenings to full-on interviews to the inevitable waiting.

One recruiter, nice enough guy, thought he'd gotten me a good contract role, & seemed offended when I told him I was still interviewing with other companies. Pressed me hard for how I would respond to an offer from his client. I pushed back. Simply put: *what offer?* I told him I would consider it seriously, if it came.

They liked me in the interview, "the team enjoyed meeting you" thing I've heard time & again. Waited, waited; then, out of the blue, someone they'd offered the job to a month ago reappeared & accepted.

The recruiter apologized, knowing I was right & he was wrong. Offered to take me out to lunch. Whatever.

Come down to Connecticut this week to hang around my old college town, New Britain, & work on *Cenacle 109* for several days straight, all my old haunts. Cheap hotel. My writing joints are fast food places & the library.

Done this trip many times before but this time jobhunting continued. I didn't bring my MacBook Pro Eurydice, just black pens & notebooks & Polly my iPod. So KD checked my emails at home & replied for me. I fielded phone calls.

Down to the crucial stage. An offer occurs. Then another. Second is better but involves an extensive & time-consuming background check. Other leads are up to the phone interview stage. Others, still, pop up from resumes sent out weeks ago.

So I went to my old writing joints, tripping on Art & Nature's medicines, & I wrote & wrote. Gumbee my phone rang & I answered. Made appointments. Got ready for background checks. Committed myself fully to none of them until the last tumblers fall into place.

As I ride this bus back to Boston, a trip I've taken hundreds of times, this process is not complete. I guess a week or so more. But it's close enough to call this journal itself complete.

A recruiter on the phone the other morning—me in my hotel room trying to get out the door to continue writing the 2011 "History of Scriptor Press" for *Cenacle 109*—found me uncowed to his pushes.

& FEEDING THE YOUNG HARE
 THE LITTLE LEVRETT
 FEEDING THE OLD HORSE
 DOES AN OLD HORSE HAVE
 A TECHNICAL TERM?

OR AM I - METAPHORICALLY -
 TALKING ABOUT MYSELF ?
 - SELVES ?

MY MISCHIEVOUS EARS ASKING QUESTIONS
 MY HAIRY LIMBS PUMPING RUBBER FEET
 OR BIGGING, LIKE FINGERTIPS INTO THE GRAINS
 MY HOOVES AGREEING WITH THE PATH
 MY PAWS IGNORING THE NEWSPAPER
 MY CURIOSITY NIBBLING AT THE CLOVER
 MY HIDE TESTING THE FENCE
 MY INSTINCT TO CARE, TO DO THINGS
 FOR OTHERS

DON'T EVEN NEED THEIR REASONS TO BE
 MY REWARD. WE DIDN'T SLEEP WELL.
 AUTUMN COMES TOSSING & TURNING US
 LIKE BRIED LEAVES IN OUR BED, FULL
 OF GHOST-LIKE DREAMS. STRONG COFFEE
 & RAW CREAM IN MY
 MY QUIVERING HEART - A START

FOR WHAT? ALL
 MY EARS PRICKED TO THE POTENT SILENCE
 INSIDE THE WIND

COMING INTO MYSELVES OF HOUSES
 LIKE A MORNING CHIMNEY, OR
 A WINDOW NOT QUITE CLOSED

THE QUIET NATURAL NOISES THAT HIGHLIGHT
 A SILENCE SOMEWHERE, A NERVOUS THING
 WHO SOOTHES ME, SOOOOTHS ME,

DOING THESE THINGS FOR YOU, FOR US, FOR I
 & I & I & I & I &

I AM GIVING THESE SELVES, I GIVING CELLS
 JOBS TO DO FOR EACH OTHER, & SOMEWHERE
 IN ALL THESE SEEMING DISTRACTIONS, I KNOW
 MEANING ITSELF OUR MASTER.

...BLESS.



To do.

A poet's journal of a poem in process

9/26/2019

← That's what I wrote this morning. I live in rural France, we have horses, and are currently raising a wounded hare.

My initial feeling was satisfaction with it, and I tried performing it, which for me at home is normally a kind of informal singing.

But then I felt I wanted to work on it more. So I took it onto samknot the computer, a text editor, transcribed it, fiddled around with it, and tried re-performing.

To do. (revision 1)

**Feeding the young hare, the little leveret,
and the aged horse—my own metaphors?
My lips demanding milk; my fingertips digging
into the mashed grains; my hooves
in accordance with the path; my paws
ignoring the newspaper; my curiosity
at the clover; my coat against the electric fence.**

**My instinct to care, to save; my desires to serve.
Don't even need their reasons to be
my reward. Not sleeping well.
Autumn coming tossing and turning
dried leaves in our bed full of ghost-like dreams.
Strong coffee and raw cream in my
my quivering heart—a start for what!? All**

**these ears pricked to the silence wind brings
to our housed selves, our chimneys moaning
and windows not properly closed—where then
the silence? The weathering nervousness
who blesses these tasks for you to soothe us;
who knows in all these seeming diversions
meaning itself to be our master.**

My initial feelings on comparing before and after in quick review is that some things are gained and some lost between the original handwritten version, and the samknot revision. I've spent a couple of hours on it now, thus really need to have a break, and will read/tweak it again over a few different days. But now must go get on with my day. A fresh pair of eyes some other day.

* * *

9/27/2019

Feelings can change. I guess that's part of the worry of changing anything—when you've had the experience of poetry unfolding over time—who am I, then, in this little slice of time & feeling, to say the better ways for this-that moment to speak?—of course I am the author, the authority, so it does make sense to struggle with it a bit sometimes—and although sometimes it is a kind of crisis to transform a poem, and then not know what it is anymore, not know which is better or if any of it “makes any sense” at all—if you push thru such it can be useful. Maybe. It's all maybe for me, because in the end it's a little different most times, and over time. Well, I will get concrete on this specific case, or perhaps rather the phase I seem to be in.

It's only been a few years since I started thinking more about any kind of formality—and perhaps this has been as much a curse as anything—but I know in myself it has produced some better work, if only through my struggling with it—it has helped show me ways to ask “what is the shape of this poem?” if I need/want to—however it is so easy to get lost in fiddling with a poem and basically lose all perspective—for me this is the danger of considering any changes at all. Maybe experiences like this were what lead to Kerouac for instance saying “first thought best thought.” It's nice then to have something to return to, an initial outpouring—and sometimes this just is the poem. Sometimes I work directly speaking or singing and record it, then work from that.

But recently I have fallen back in love with handwriting—the quiet music of words inside the head translated in hand moves and rhythms. When this first happened (it had a bit to do with getting right into Blake recently: his hand in the original illuminated poetry is an extra dimension—it is part of a special magic that poetry has to me—its ability to really spring to life—but then lots of people, at least in his own day, found Blake a bit much one way or the other—and still you find the dictum: DONT ILLUSTRATE YOUR OWN POETRY. I was reading some poetry, or maybe even prose, and it struck me as absurd that I should be tuning into this unique, unrepeatable voice through an absolutely uniform delivery system: that is: standardised fonts.

Now there is of course great beauty in this too! The way such different spirits can leap from absolute formal similitude, or standardised building blocks, and some people might see any individuality in the lettering itself as a distraction—it is not ABOUT the letters/look of them. But I think this whole thing is interesting—and my thought has been to pay more attention to the act of writing, the actual line of the words leaving my hand, as an expression of energy—it is a way for me to explore the shape of the poem more meaningfully.

And it works differently to speaking, even though it is a kind of silent speech. I'm not sure the degree to which it differs from typing on a computer, but I feel it might—for one thing there is less temptation to edit as one goes. And it's way nicer on the eyes, and of course more of a continuum, a line, whereas when you type each individual letter is a pop. It's more connected to the energy of the body, ultimately, for me. Typing feels more distanced.

So here is how the poem looks/feels to me today—and it is a more settled feeling than yesterday, so I trust it more.

I have added a little bit, about the crane fly at the window—because I remembered that was part of my anxiety/sense of unreality that day—looking at the crane fly (I got up at 4am and made a drawing of it) against the window, and all the little raindrops like worlds—and so for me the sense of so many other realities that sometimes my own starts to feel undermined (but I am learning to appreciate this) and basically, after all the strange introspective philosophy of my semi-natural state—the wonderful peace in just being able to do things for others, to switch myself off a little and go into task mode. Anyway, I feel the poem is clearer now, about the actual sense and cause/effects of what I was hoping to say. I will leave it here for now, but won't know until another morning . . .

To do. (revision 2)

**Feeding the young hare—the little leveret—
& the old horse—does an old horse have
a technical term? Or are these perhaps
my own metaphors? My mischievous ears
asking questions. My hairy lips pumping
at the rubber teet, or like fingertips
digging through the grains. My hooves
in accordance with the path. My paws
ignoring the newspaper. My curiosity
nibbling at the clover. My coat against
the electric fence. My instinct to care,
to do things for others, a serving of
my own desires? Don't even need
their reasons to be
my reward. Not sleeping well.
Autumn comes tossing and turning us
like dried leaves in our bed, full
of ghost-like dreams. Strong coffee
and raw cream in my
my quivering heart! A start for what?
All the worlds inside the raindrops—
the codes of crane fly legs against
the bathroom window—shocked still
by eternity's infinite dawn. All my ears
pricked to the potent silence wind brings
into my housed selves—chimneys moaning
and windows not properly closed—
a silence always some place else—
a weathering nervousness who soothes me.
Who soothes me? These things I do
for you, for us, for I
& I & I & I & I &
I am giving these selves, I giving cells,
the blessed tasks of each other to know
in all these seeming distractions
our master meaning itself.**

So, first off, my back-and-forth-ing so frustrates me—but I know it is work—even fucking around going *ow*, this-way-that—I learn.

The lesson I most take is to carry on going forward—I mean just to write, and let it be, until the time comes, if it ever does, to collect things—and then the bunch of them together will help me decide what they are, or want to be. So that is how I will carry on for now, just scratching 'em out as & when and stacking 'em up—



I know Little O (Odin Fluffy Ostara Hare Krishna Knot) was accidentally wounded by a lawnmower and my wife, with her history as a vet, was a natural choice for the concerned party to turn to, to give the “bunny” a chance to survive. But I also feel whether the hare lives or dies (though I so hope sHe lives, lives here, but lives most dearly (that tiny vibrating heart)) sHe is an emissary/gift/lesson from a/the “other” world:

Essentially the realm of faery, and I “really” mean this—a realm of other- and/or more-than-human intelligences that intersect with humanimal world—akin to (at least) the world of the dead & pre-/un-born—having agency, plot/plots, characters, struggles, mysteries—having things to do with our world just as ours has to do with it/ them (ithem? Yes: A Uni Verse).

For now I just want to state the emotional ramifications of this: It seems to increase the sensitivity of ones private morality. I mean, imagine religion as moral code but imposed/ external/social, one can rail against it, feel it as intrusion, chide, disbelieve, disobey, ignore it. We know Omniscience, in theory, is even watching you pee—but we don't really believe it—it is something they try to convince us of, perhaps using mystery or our vulnerability as an opening.

Faery is an indisputable personal moral reality. My relationship to it is at once a wanting to believe, to enchant my world, and people it more-than-human; and the intensely challenging nature of the intuition that in some sense this is precisely how it actually is. This is an occasionally terrifying thing: that to know truth or reality you (or some of us) have to go through the human to/ward something elfs/other; that this world-journey has its own game-codes & prices; that it lives: it does not submit to you, nor you to it; it is neither visible nor invisible; it is moral and transgressive. It is WILD, and this is a more-than-human civilisation. It is funny, playful, but lethal, no joke.

And this is not something someone else has tried to convince you of, it suggests itself across your experiences, answers enigmatically your questionings. It reveals more & more without ever exiting liminality. Thus it more & more imagines YOU, makes you mythical, imaginal—and this is wondrous & terrifying!

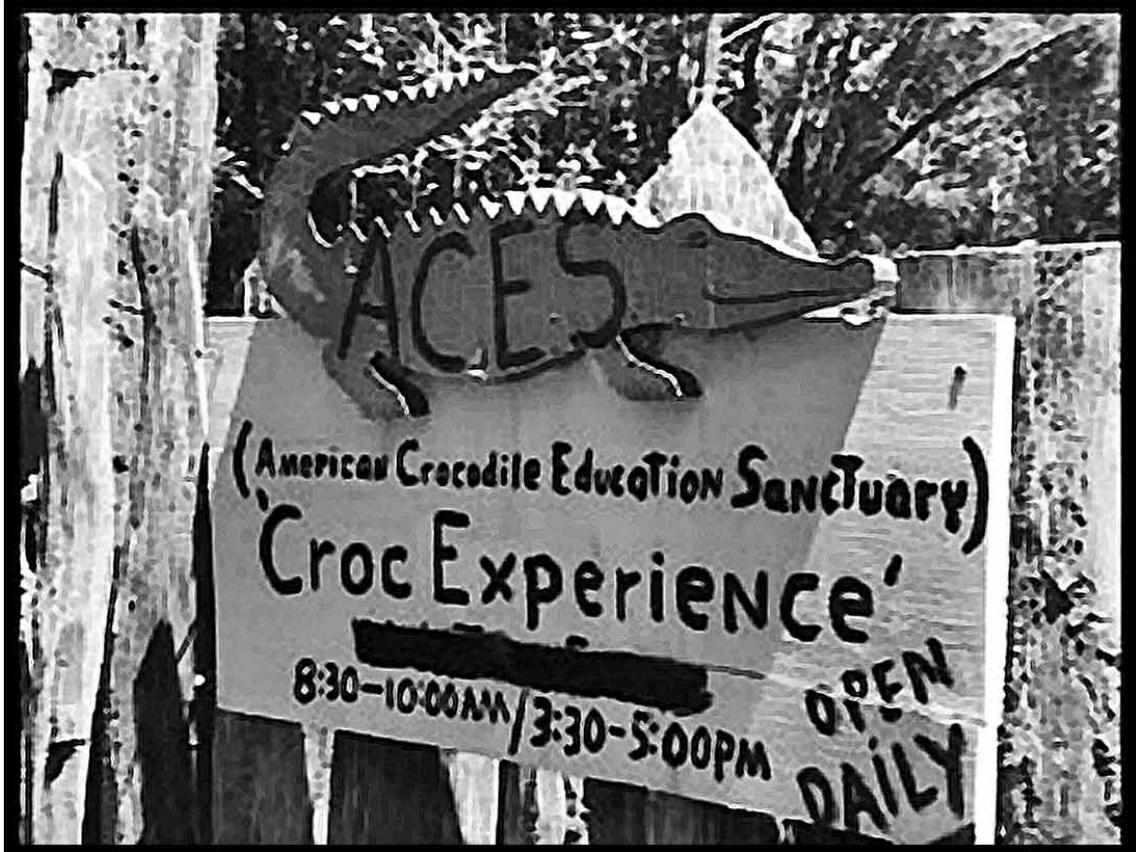
You see a beautiful open field of possibilities, a wonder, a wander, a drift. But sometimes a minefield—you walk your own path as if (no as if!) a tightrope. Perhaps these are the times you learn most. Glad when they are over, but happy—eventually—that they occurred.

This magical enchanted world might be the one you will die into—you don't want enemies there, being the kind you cannot escape. This confrontational force is ruthless. It is love. Binding. Painful. Suffering & struggle. The melancholic tone that sets off beauty, makes it sound, makes it so.

This is the real war god, the real knowledge, the real goddess of love. The impish drunk. *Kerplunk kerplunk*. The footsteps on the night stairs. The wind knock at the door. You alone with what you love to fear, fear to love. Yourself that is unutterably other. Your alien heart. Unmirrorable nature—the reflection that absorbs all. That is light itself.

* * * * *







The Crocodile King of Belize

[Prose]

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 108 | June 2019)

xvi. Rageaholic - September 1st, 2010

“Where the hell are you?”

“I’m on my way,” says Gina into the cell phone with Ramone on the other end.

“Do you even know where the fuck I am?”

“You’re at Casa Bonita on the edge of town. Allen’s restaurant.”

“How did you figure that shit out?” asks Ramone, as he takes another swig off the now three-quarters empty fifth of cheap sugar cane rum.

“Um. Mahee told me.”

“What the hell are you talking to Mahee for? That goddamned bent dick!” Jealousy is rising like the spring tide in his face.

“He wanted to thank me.”

“Thank you for what? You don’t do shit except fuck.”

“I cleaned his house. He’s upstairs in the restaurant, ya know.”

“You’re a stinking liar. Is that it? You never cleaned shit except his cock. Quit lying to me, bitch.”

“Oh Ramone, you know I love you. I had to make some money for cab fare to come see you. You know, last time you wouldn’t give me any money.”

“So you made money by fucking him? That’s it, isn’t it? You fucked him.”

Silence on Gina’s end of the phone.

Casa Bonita is the best place to eat in town. A square cement building next to the sea, with the clientele seated upstairs enjoying the view. Ramone comes by regularly when sober, as Allen is the only person in town who will tolerate him.

Ramone has small man syndrome. He doesn’t top four-foot-eight inches tall, but acts like the Tasmanian devil when he’s boozed up and on the rage. He’s a clear case of a filthy rich, entitled, and spoiled little boy. The parents in Florida own Blunt Cigars, whose sales have quadrupled since it became popular to stuff them with marijuana and re-sell on the streets of Miami. They have a mansion on the coast near Coin Beach. Ramone has a sailboat in the Miami marina.

His parents insisted that he do something with himself, but Ramon’s small stature translated to his brain-power also. He was what has been called “a few French fries short of a Happy Meal.”

He got a job teaching wrestling in the Dade County High School. Being short and white, he was considered fair prey for by the towering black kids. But that didn’t work out for them, as his fiery disposition at first amused them, then terrified them, especially when he swore to kick their asses and then kill them. Often he would attack a student in the hall twice his size, and thrash him furiously to end the fight quickly. Ramone would then be hauled into the personnel department where he was threatened with firing, legal action, and so on.

But they could not fire him. He was the only person who would do the job in the sea of hoodlums who cared for nothing but physical power. The students might not learn a thing about

the three R's (reading, writing, and 'rithmetic), but Ramone engaged them with macho bravado and encouraged them to come to school to fight. This, in turn, kept the federal money flowing on a per capita basis, predicated on the attendance rolls.

The consequence of the job and the low brain-power turned Ramone into a miniature cartoon Popeye. With his little legs beneath, he rose like a triangle of muscle, rippling in his chest and arms. He spent all day lifting weights, climbing ropes, and jostling on the mat with those twice his size. He joined wrestling competitions and won, much to the surprise of the judges.

He had some technique, and certainly all the muscle mass that could be crammed onto his small frame. He was invited to Czechoslovakia for an international wrestling championship, and won second place for his weight class, the smallest. This accomplishment was blurted out for the rest of his life in every conversation. "I won the international wrestling championship in Europe in 2008. So don't you think about fucking with me . . ."

Nobody thought about it. This guy looked like trouble from a quarter-mile away. Only someone with a similarly violent inferior complex would ever consider it.

Ramone stomps around on the lower patio getting madder and madder in proportion to the diminishing rum in his glass, and the increased tempo of the phone call.

"Let me in, you mutha'fuckers!" A doorway of bars blocks Ramone from going up the stairs to the restaurant. He continues to shout from below.

"Let me up there, you assholes! I know Mahee is up there. I'm gonna fuck that fucker up!"

Allen comes down the stairs to the other side of the locked gate to the restaurant stairs.

"Ramone, go away. We're not letting a violent drunk up into our business."

"Let me the fuck in, Allen. I gotta kill that Mahee! He fucked my girl!"

"Come on, Ramone. Just go home and sleep it off. Get outta here."

Mahee and JC come to stand at the top of the stairs where they can see the mad assailant raving and twirling on the patio.

"Hey, Ramone. *What the fuck is your problem?* Gina has fucked everyone else in town. What? Ya don't like sloppy 200ths?"

"You fuckhead! Come down here and I'll chop the shit outta you!" shouts Ramone.

"You pathetic little rich boy! I can call my friends at the police station and have you locked up, you little asshole shrimp!"

These are the flash point words to Ramone: "little" and "shrimp." Few other insults could rile the excitable maniac more. His size is the most sensitive subject to the diminutive but enraged man. Ramone grabs a dull machete leaning in a pile of gardening tools.

"*You fuck! You fuck! I'll kill you! I'll chop you! Chop you, asshole!*" The clients in the restaurant are not eating now. Now they are jerking their heads to each new outburst, too nervous to chew, fearing the blade wielder will burst into the room. Wild men with machetes are not uncommon in Punta Gorda, with one or two a week chopping into bars and homes.

"Who is this little asshole?" asks JC of Mahee.

"He's a spoiled little rich kid from Miami. Thinks he runs the place down here."

"I know you are a gun-runner, you fucking asshole. You think you're better than me? I'm turning you in to the Defense Department. You'll rot in jail being butt-fucked till your eyes pop out. Fuck you!" raves Ramone.

"Go ahead, ya little prick. It's you who's going behind bars. The BDF [Belize Defense Force] and I are the best of friends. They love me. Just like I loved Gina's ass."

"I'll kill you. I'll kill you!" Ramone flails the machete as a crazy man, hacking at the steel bars of the door, clanging loudly with each blow. *Clang-clang!* and then *thud!* as he hits the door-frame of dense wood.

"Stop that you little prick!" yells Allen. "Yer fucking up my house. Lay off the wood work now or I'll break your nose!"

“You couldn’t break shit, ya bent dick!” *Hack-back! Clang!* goes the swinging knife against the frame and bars.

“Yeah, maahn. Her ass was juicy . . . I got my ease. Sweet eeease,” taunts Mahee.

This new insult sends Ramone into an apoplexy, spinning and hacking at the walls everywhere, and whacking the metal bars in the stairwell.

“*You’ll die! I’ll shred you, you fuck! You cock-sucker! Corrupt pig, gun-running fuck! Chop you! Chop you!*” *Clang-clang! whack-back!* the bent and battered blade works the doorway into gashes and splinters, making the edges ragged.

JC pulls out a pistol and aims down the stairwell at Ramone, who is huffing back and forth, shouting swear words to no one listening. “Fuck! *Fuck*. All you got is a *bent dick* and my machete up your ass.”

“Can I shoot the little lunatic?” JC asks Mahee. “Let me give the little runt a cap.”

“No, no,” says Mahee. “A white man cannot shoot anyone and get away with it. My police can shoot him though.”

“Call them. Get the little prick shot. Nobody is gonna care. *Do it.*”

“My phone doesn’t work here,” says the gunrunner, by way of an excuse for not taking action. *Whack! whack!* the knife slashes at the wooden door-frame.

“Stop that you, dick! I’ll have to replace all that wood! Yer fucking up my restaurant!”

“I’ll fuck up all you assholes! I’ll chop the shit out of everyone here, bitches and all you fucks! I’ll kill you! Kill you!” *Whack!* on the door-frame. Ramone’s face is almost purple with rage, and the alcohol is flushing blood to his deranged head.

“Stop it ya, asshole!” yells Allen through the bars.

Ramone thrusts his arm through the gaps in the bars, flailing the knife at Allen, who has stepped back a stair. Suddenly, Allen lunges forward and grabs Ramone’s arm, twisting it in pain until the knife is dropped. Then, with a sudden move, Allen delivers a lightning fast blow through the iron bars, straight into Ramone’s nose.

A *thud*, like dropping a melon on a wooden floor. Ramone staggers back, unaccustomed to anyone ever fighting back. He is stunned and falls undignified to his ass on the concrete patio. A dazed and bewildered look on his damaged mug, twisted in hate and pain. He moans loudly and rolls over to his side, sprawling out as though he was shot. He is quiet for a moment, though still trembling on the ground in his fury.

A car, a local taxi, missing two side panels, pulls up in front, and Gina rushes out to Ramone’s side.

“Oh baby. Oh darling. What is wrong?”

“You bitch! You whore! Get the fuck away from me!” he spits.

Gina hugs his now sitting position, coddling him in her arms.

“Ramone, it’s me. I love you,” she coos. Ramone stiffens, then relaxes to her touch. He seems to come out of his stupor, gazing around bewildered as though he cannot remember how he got there.

“Gina, you came to me. What the fuck is going on?”

“Come on, Ramone. Let’s go to bed and let me love you,” she says, stroking his head. The physical attention calms the Tasmanian devil. His breathing becomes less ragged, slower, as he regains some control over his emotions. Like Rasputin did with Alexis, the Tzar’s hemophiliac only son, Ramone’s blood congeals to a calmer state.

“Come with me, darling. You are the one,” Gina promises him. The one who will save her from this whore’s existence in the Third World, the only life she has ever known. Bring her to a cushy life of riches in Florida, next to the massive cigar inheritance she knows he has coming to him.

She helps him up from the concrete and, with her arm around him, shuffles toward the street to depart the premises. Allen, JC, and Mahee watch the drama through the bars of the entrance.

“Don’t mind the herpes, micro-dick! My gift to you!” shouts Mahee behind them. Ramone



swivels in Gina's arms, but she holds him from rushing back. She is of the same height as the wrestler, but her extra weight prevents his escape.

"I'll kill you, asshole!" Ramone barks back, weakly now, and succumbs to Gina's soothing, limping away into the steaming tropical night.

"Got rid of that dick," says JC. "Did you really just fuck her?" he asks Mahee.

"Hell, yeah. The tramp. How else do you think she got cab fare here?"

"Kinda fat, ain't she?" counters JC.

"Yeah. But good ease, mahn. She can suck the paint off a baseball bat."

"Wow. Sounds sweet. What it run ya?"

"Twenty bucks. It ain't nuttin to me."

"Hmmm. Ten bucks US. I might have to try that."

"Don't recommend it with that crazy fuck around though. That boy is one vexed little asshole."

"I'd just shoot the prick."

"Sounds good. What kinda pistol is that ya got there anyway?"

"A Glock 37. Accurate too."

"Nice. Ya think you could get me a dozen of those?"

"Sure. I can get them."

"That will be sweet, mahn. I'll make sure all the officers get them, and use them to protect you from the crazies like Ramone."

"We have deal then. Let's do it," says JC.

Allen picks up the twisted and dented machete and they head back upstairs for some apple pie, made from the tree overhanging the patio.

xvii. The Croc Farm - September 3rd, 2010

The three Mayans, two men and a woman, appear out of the jungle like blue morpho butterflies coming into a clearing. They are wary of being out in the open. Their body language says "timid" and "demure." They stand respectfully on the property line, saying nothing, looking expectantly into JC's compound.

The woman's long colorful skirt is rimmed with mud where it rubs the ground. The men stand stockily in their black rubber boots, wearing cheap slacks from a Chinese factory. These are tucked into their boots just below their knees. Sweat-stained tee shirts advertising Nike and Corona finish their ensemble. Each holds his thumb in his belt as if his pants would fall down, and in his other hand is a machete. First grasped as a baby, then never let go of throughout his life.

JC irritably goes out to the edge of the property to meet them. If they come onto the property, then JC and Rose would be obligated by the norms of the land to offer them lunch. He knows the little beggars are probably angling for that. What else could they be coming around here for? He's already made it clear to them that he's not hiring any of the lazy scum. They do not know how to do the most basic things. All they can do is chop vegetation, chop and chop. Well, everything is chopped, so he has no need for their lazy efforts.

"What do you want!" bellows JC. He makes no attempt to be polite, as he knows that these people are here because they want something. The Mayans are not big talkers. They just look at the ground and shuffle their feet.

"Well, what is it? What are you doing here? I have no work, and I wouldn't give it to you lazy fools anyway if I did have it," declares JC. With what seems a great effort, one of the men raises his head to look up at the towering white man.

"Mr. JC. We no want any trouble. We just looking for our children. We hear they may be out here," mumbles the man in a low voice.

"Your children!" booms JC. "What the fuck would your children be doing way the hell out

here? There's no children here. You little jungle monkeys lost your kids? I thought all the jungle was your home."

"Wondering if you see them?" asks the diminutive Mayan man.

"No. I not 'see them.' I have work here. I can't be looking out for jungle bunnies running through the brush. Why in the fuck would you think they are here?"

"Wise lady at the market think kids be here," says the woman.

"*Bullshit!* There's no kids here. Never has been, never will be. So get the fuck outta here. Your stupid market lady has her head up her ass, and pulled that idea straight out of it. So fuck you. *Get the hell outta here.*"

The Mayans have their heads bowed. They are not used to confrontation, nor anyone raising their voice. They shuffle their muddy croc shoes on the ground, unsure of what to do. Then JC really erupts.

"*No.* There's no asshole kids here. If there was, I'd hand over their dead bodies. Who wants these worthless monkeys anyway? Sure as hell *not me.* So get the fuck off my property before I shoot your ass! I've got guns and will blow holes in you like Swiss cheese! Beat it!"

The Mayans have no idea what Swiss cheese is, but get the idea from the violent white man. The woman has picked up a child's shoe on the side of the road, and brandishes it in front of JC.

"This show the children were here. This shoe—is children."

"That shoe ain't shit. This is a dump road. There's all sorts of garbage all the hell over the place. Does that old stove mean I'm prime minister? *No.* It don't mean *jack.* Now get your stupid bush baby asses the fuck outta here before I start shooting. I'm sick of you parasites with your stupid petty greed. Go on, git the fuck outta here!"

JC looms tall and ominous over the Mayans, his eyes starting out of his head in anger. The timid Mayans turn and shuffle back into the jungle on the muddy road strewn with trash. The woman puts the shoe in her pocket. They take small hurrying steps, as much as their short legs will allow them, like children catching up to the adults. An irritation and defiance is in their gait.

xviii. Off To San Pedro - September 4th, 2018

"There is a man-eating crocodile in the lagoon behind 7th Street."

"They are all man-eating," states JC.

"That may be, but this one's *eaten* a man," excitedly exclaims Vincent Hyde, the Mayor of San Pedro. "The thing just came launching up out of the water, and snatched Mr. Johnson right out of his back yard, still gripping his beer. We have to kill this monster, Mr. JC."

"*No.* No, no we don't. I can catch him. Quick thing," says JC, using the local parlance for a simple task done fast.

"And how do you propose to do that?" asks the Mayor indignantly.

"I'll bring my skiff and equipment. We'll lasso his nose. Drug 'em up a little. Stone him, heh heh heh. Know what I mean? Then we'll tie 'em up and bring 'em back to the sanctuary."

"You mean ACES in Punta Gorda?"

"Yep. That's the place. Crocodile Hotel California. Three meals a day," quips JC.

"What's this going to cost the city of San Pedro?" asks the Mayor.

"Almost nothing for the alleviation of such danger. Imagine if an American tourist got chomped? What would be the cost of the bad publicity?"

"It's bad enough as it is. What's the damage?"

"I'll charge \$300 in travel expenses, and \$200 for the capture. Now that's a bargain. Or, if you want, we could just let it swim around there."

"*No.* That's no bargain. That's blackmail."

"Take it or—"

“OK, OK, I’ll do it. I’ll have the secretary cut you a check. You can have it when you get here. Correction: when you’ve captured the croc.”

“How will I know if I’m catching the right one? You have a lot of crocs up there.”

“By the red lipstick. Wadda ya think? We’ll point it out. It has a white patch on its tail. When can you get here?”

“OK. We can leave tonight and I’ll be there by noon tomorrow. Will that work for you, Mr. Hyde?”

“Sounds like a plan.” The Mayor promptly hangs up the phone.

“Byyyyyeeee.” says JC into the dead air. He is still unused to lack of politeness down here.

“Honey, are you getting ready? Your plane for the Philippines leaves tomorrow at 7AM. Let’s get going to Belize City so we can get there before dark.”

“Yeah. Yeah. I’m packed. Just have to add some more ice and clean up the kitchen.”

“Why the hell do you have to clean up the kitchen? We’re leaving. Nobody will be here. *What the hell.* Leave it,” snarls JC.

He sighs and goes out to hook up the boat trailer and pack a few crocodile catching tools. In a half hour they are ready to go in the big Dodge pickup. Rose puts her suitcase and an Igloo beer cooler in the back, and JC tosses in a duffel bag. Then they are off down the muddy road. Rose holds her side, as the jostling is causing her a lot of pain on the right side. On the asphalt road, it is smooth and they make good time heading north on the Southern Highway.

In the morning, JC drops Rose off at the airport. A large black man suddenly appears to carry her bag (for an unspoken fee), but Rose holds the cooler with her.

“OK, baby. Have a good time. Say hello to your folks for me. Stay safe.” Rose gives him a quick kiss and heads into the international gate.

JC proceeds through his day, which starts with launching his boat and motoring thirty miles up through beautiful tropical cays covered in mangroves. The water is azure blue, and the bottom can be seen less than twenty feet below the boat. Landing in San Pedro, JC checks into the Sea & Sand Hotel, run by an American ex-pat, and heads to the bar to meet the Mayor.

The Mayor assures him he will have two assistants in the morning to go catch the killer croc. A nice dinner of red snapper and four beers has JC pretty relaxed. He sits in the lounge chair on the beach to watch all the beautiful people. The North American and European tourists in their bright bathing suits, affording views of the most secret skin that’s been hidden in northern winters. As he reclines in the beautiful sunset, breezes full of flowers and the sea, a very black woman comes up to him, wearing a thong and little else.

“Weel you have sex with me?” she whines. “I need to get two chicken for my children.” She continues with a pleading whine, “You want have sex with me? I need two chicken.”

“Holy shit. Does this mean I’ll have to do her twice?” thinks JC.

“No. I don’t want to have sex with you. Here’s a shilling. Good luck to you,” he says, handing her one of the octagonal brass coins that serves as dollars here. She has some sores on her face and arms, and looks like a walking AIDS bomb. He is sorry she needs chickens for her kids, but how likely is that, really?

More likely she needs crack, and not for her kids. JC remembers the old saying as he watches her ass amble into the crowd: “I wouldn’t fuck her with *somebody else’s* dick!”

To be concluded in Cenacle | 110 | December 2019

* * * * *



Joe Ciccone**Riding With My Wife In An Old Willys**

I only have one gear left
and that's all we need

on this old beach road,
getting passed by mopeds,

afterthoughts
in a fast-forward world,

searching for nothing tonight,
just crossing the moor,

feeling as austere as helium,
oblivious to the last glint of summer days,

rolling headlong toward the winter solstice,
the days, for us, always too few,

and past my prime now,
you still see Adonis,

and together we laugh at the psychiatrists,
who should see psychiatrists,

and how we lucked out like this,
sharing this one drive,

our threats, for a moment,
made of gauze.

I imagined a place called Patriot's Hill,
where the colonials lay,

the smell from their corpses coming all at once,
like when the wind blows in Chinatown.

Don't tell anyone but I can show you
where all the flowers have gone.

Am I getting shorter?
Don't tell me,

I don't want to know, nor
how a rainbow works

and how the sky here
can be so close to the water.

My gravel mouth,
our sleepy-colored room,

the windlass and the wipers,
the smell of polyurethane,

the split windshield,
the church bells,

like songs in the dark—
these memories of us nourishing,

tho like the signal from this old radio—
fading, like a pearl,

a pearl melting.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Secret Joy Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

*“Think for yourself
& question authority.”*
—Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Eighteen
continued from
The Cenacle | 104 | June 2018

Read the full History at: http://scriptorpress.com/history_of_scriptor_press.pdf

Cenacle | 78 | June 2011 begins, of course, with its cover, designed by KD, what she calls “microllages,” three little collages scattered across the page. One of note contains a scrap of text, “the desert is a myth,” angled against another scrap reading “HISTORY,” & I wonder if she juxtaposed these thinking of all our years in the Nevada desert at the Burning Man Arts Festival.

“From Soulard’s Notebooks,” written, where often, at the lounge of the Marriott Hotel at Copley Place in Boston, ruminates on the world’s then so-called “hard times.” I write, in part:

I wonder can this be possible, to convince otherwise thriving parts of the world that these are times of recession, even depression, that good governance means there is less to spread around, to share, certainly less time & fewer resources to devote to retarding human suffering & global environmental destruction. Now is a time for a reinforced military, an ever-more-fortified minority of wealthy individuals & families.



In short, the rich & powerful of this world never seem to suffer much, go hungry, sacrifice. As ever, the poor & working class, of nearly whatever country, race, religion, nation-state, are pressed to make do with less, give back whatever buffer they might have, display their good souls & good citizenships to feed the crises their masters have contrived. Feed it mostly by cowing to the truths of a world system built by haves, on the backs of the have-nots, fueled by the blood of their labor’s years, & acquiescence to the belief that *inequality is just*.

And here’s my call to action:

Say no. It's simple, it's hard. It's tiring. What reward? Sometimes little. Almost none. But something Something gives way, a bit, a convulse, a crack, not often, not for long, but see it. It is a very real Empire, world-wide, & yet. And yet. The power of no. Again. Again. Thrown stone in the Prison of Glass. The free air before the pane is patched.

The struggle never ends. The struggle is sometimes the best we've got. As the saying goes: "Resist. Insist, Persist."

Debuting in this issue is travel writing by Charlie Beyer, who I'd briefly met a few years before at Burning Man. He got in touch, sent me "A Travel to Belize," & here is how it opens:

The emerald sea purrs its relentless surf against the blue sand beach. A lighthouse on a knoll beside sweeps the horizon. A delicious costal wind blows steady over us. Clouds of butterflies, yellow, iridescent blue, fill the air. Huge willowy pines play their tops in the breeze. The temperature is perfect. No mosquitoes. Little crabs shyly poke their heads from holes in the sand to see if we are still too close.

Crossing the U.S.-Mexican border in a trailer filled with him, girlfriend Kim, a dog, & two cats, proves a nightmare. Pages & pages of weird, scary, & surreal encounters, & many payoffs, concludes as they drive

[o]ut of the parking lot, which turns into a shabby two-lane highway. No mention of vet papers or any other animal documentos ever came up. We could have brought in elephants. We are elated. In the first mile are a hundred crappy one-story adobe, block, and rusty tin buildings, all proclaiming money exchange. I stop and change out \$300 to pesos, a rate of 12.3 to one buck. I have a huge wad of cash, of which I'm very self-conscience and hold concealed. The practice is to watch these transactions from afar, then mug you down the road. Buy some fluids for Kim and I, climb out of the mud ruts and onto the broken highway. We did it! We are into Mexico at last. On our way to paradise.

Beyer's writing is fierce, funny, & engrossing. His adventures in Belize are wild, & he writes of them fearlessly. His intolerance for bureaucratic bullshit intermingles with his unflinching descriptions of his own mistakes & foibles. Like many other great *Cenacle* contributors, he should be famous, & he isn't. So I gladly publish his work to get what readership & regard I am able for it. It deserves much.

Lots of good poetry in this issue again, worth lingering on here.

Judih Haggai's haiku is ever delightful, her craft & passion producing such as these:

*what now, peacock
false shrieks this morning
a dance of ego*

* * *

*again
peacocks and i
awakened by boom*

* * *

*silence calls
peacock calls back
all is well*

Her peacock 'ku is nicely accompanied by a photo of her brightly feathered muses.
The one that gets me hardest is this one, about another kind of bird:

*fallen stork
on the side of the road
refuses to die*

It takes a powerful mind & heart, a unique perception & empathy, an artist who knows which few words to use, to craft a tribute like this one.

Martina Newberry's poetry is funny, garrulous, sad, restless, funky. In "Unfit Ghazal," employing an ancient & intricate poetic form, she writes these beautiful lines:

*I challenge you to live this life, as full on as you can,
without shame, without fear, put on an armor of silk.*

*Hear that sound? It's the world's heart, pounding in your ears,
praying for your attention, praying for food, offering silk.*

*Along this dirt path, where glass and lizards glow,
A new berry bush is trying to prosper. Its leaves are silk.*

Her sound, her music, lilts her words, powers the deep & wide gestures of her meaning.

The poetry of Tom Sheehan often refers back to his beloved hometown of Saugus, Massachusetts. His "Nearly Saugus When I Was Young"'s opening lines perfectly captures his theme:

*It is always nearly Saugus
No matter where I am,
Coming from anyplace, going to,
Sure as snow or crocus after
Or the clock turning on,
Sure as clam flats on air
And kelp bubbles breaking down
Under confection of dry salt
And the river knowing its wares
Through nine-foot cat-o-nines
Standing ripe as fire arrows.*

What lives in Sheehan's heart & memory is rendered beautifully on the page. *He remembers, he sings.*

Joe Ciccone's poems are precise, powerful, strange yet simple. Witness these lines from "Last Night":

*I was presented with the reality of God.
In the 11th hour I knew he was there—
The world rocked and rattled in my ears,
Everything screamed around me, my bed was boiling.*

*I was forced to confront Him,
And He was far less forgiving than advertised.*

His work wows me.

Ric Amante's "She's Like a Rainbow" plays a love song against many colors of affection. Here's one:

*You're my deep blue anchor,
not blue as sad but as alchemic
bond and paradox—
an anchor without chains
connecting me to the man
I am becoming—with you.*

Review of my other pieces in the issue begins with *Many Musics, Seventh Series*. Continues with some of my dream-poems, a new approach that revived my poetical work. I'd started keeping a daily dream journal in 2009, & discovered eventually that I could collaborate with my dreaming self. The dreams were source material, word-&-image clay to be molded into poems.

Three poems in particular to discuss. "Ikebana" is inspired by the wonderful Dale Chihuly exhibition, *Chihuly: Through the Looking Glass*, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. My poem mixes a Chihuly wooden & glass piece called "Ikebana Boat," a strangely overly-laden glass vessel, with memories of my brothers, equally strange beings:

*Walking back into the shop where the patrons
beg for books of easy treatises on God
& cartoons of lovers from their hearts'
forbidden chambers, I stop. I stop.
I wonder again if this is my brother's
boat, if his onion-shaped bullets, &
wooden bells leaking fuel oil aren't this world
a level or two below, moving even slower.*

"Another Way" I quote here in full. It is a poem from a dream of my dear friend Jim Burke III & myself:

*We stood, my brother & me, regarding
the pattern on the wall, the labyrinth
fading, right to left, how to travel
that one? I noticed his fingers tapping the tune,
the one in my mind too, & a few steps
more to daylight, if not answers, numberless
paths, if not a way, & the next day's chance.
We nodded, went, maybe the fading labyrinth
our clue that letting go the map is hard, best chance.*

I linger with that last line: "letting go the map is hard, best chance." That's a wise wisdom I can't deny nor fully abide by. Jim was part of my map, a crucial, wonderful part of my map. I've struggled often since to draw a new map without his frequent, physical presence.

"Seeding" begins with a quote from Bill Hicks regarding his philosophy of life: "It's just a ride."

It opens:

What if you realize, one day, that everything is alive? Not one, as many the guru would say, still many, but alive? All alive, the easy of this watching your love stirring the dawn, walking the pathless trees of an unnamed wood. The hard of this, when looking at the worn out things of men, lost of shine & purpose, gummed & greasy, broken last hour or longer.

It follows through a variety of considerations till it buckles in for its conclusion:

But say: Everything is alive, made to find its function & receive its due? Aren't the massing murderous ways of men enough? Why worry the dark light bulbs & steers to the knife? The fate of snowflakes & old wrecks in deserts & rivers? Do some empathies lead nowhere but lonesome dream corners of the fancy? I have surely wondered all this, as you do tonight. Felt the chasm among each & all wide & bricked as though by stone. I've wondered too: why feel but only so far, why imagine but with an eye on the clock, an ear for the door? Tonight, perhaps, we ask this question over a distance wider than the world. Wonder, hopeless, yet still, does paradise not steam from the shit as the sonnet, the burning, the breathless, as every new psalm of smoke?

This poem is how I see the world, *alive* in all its beauty, fury, weirdness, decay, refuse. I feel how the molecules of each are nearly alike, & shift endlessly among forms. “We belong to the world” is how Daniel Quinn put it in his brilliant 1992 novel, *Ishmael*. Literally, figuratively, & ever on. When I write poems like “Seeding,” I’m happy, doing what’s good worth doing.

Notes from New England's piece this time is called “Reflections on Return.” It’s about my returning back to Boston (with KD, who’s originally from the Midwest & lived out West with me too), a place I’d left in 2002. The heart of this piece is this:

But this too: I left here in 2002 jobless, lonely, tired, bent on chasing a fruitless dream. For years I didn't even visit. I didn't want to confront that departure, or its aftermath. For a year now I've been confronting it, how returning feels, how time passes, how nothing goes away & nothing returns. Being jobless here, years later but the same dark rage over it, not alone this time but still. Shut out from the better aspects of daily human traffic. Even now employed, the wounds of recent years

remain, the lack of trust that a job will remain, that a bean-counter won't nod & cross out my name. Real, real, & time to smooth it out from live rage to remembered.

For all the mixtures of joys & sadnesses through my years-long relation with Boston, with New England, I can only say this: I don't wish to be anywhere else. Through my own worst hours & idiocies, I know this is true. It is, simply, what my brother Ric Amante calls gratefulness. Fears, yes, & regrets, sure, but hungers for new connections & renewed old ones, new plans to know more & remember better, & cultivate hope. It's not that I've earned my return here; it's that, having returned, I earn my place here every day, every hour, sometimes better, sometimes worse. Gratefulness. Privilege. The wish to show my worth now to all those wandering years, that I remember them, & to the many times to come, better if I make them so.

I still struggle at times to show my worth & my gratefulness. No map to it. Test always in this moment, & the next, & the next, ever on.

Labyrinthine [a new fixation]'s pages take up a full third of this issue. Its pages are from 2008 or so, when I'd been writing this book for two years. As of this writing (October 2019), I've been writing this book for 13 years. So a reaching from now back to those pages I wrote eleven years ago, still living in Portland, Oregon.

I write what I want, which is mostly a complex of stories that resemble fiction, at least somewhat. But I let in other words, ideas, rants into it. There's a passage that I think dwells near the heart of this book:

The day's news headlines told of one nation invading another, & a general's boast of how many targets awaited, we will crush you, crush you, the firepower we bear is goodly, Godly, each explosion speaks our blood vengeance for every dark memory, every wife & child we've lost to you, every home & marketplace, we will crush you & more, you will never harm us again, our God-possessed weapons will annihilate your bodies & your very souls, your way of life, plots & plans, what you believe, what you love, what you hold waits beyond this world, feel this anger that our countless generations have cumed, the cries of our rent mothers & fallen kings, & baby-faced soldiers with their limbs & guts gone, feel it, feel us, each of us, as we crush you, destroy your crops & your roads & your bridges as you have destroyed ours but you did so with a false god, thus a false premise to your idea of who would finally vanquish whom, for you see you are the evil we speak of in our sacred stories, you are the other, the terror beyond hills & woods & dunes, what we train our children to loathe, to fear, to cry out in fullthroated triumph as it is destroyed. Your soldiers, your women, your soldiers, your old men & women. Your kings & presidents. Your artwork & sacred books. Your calm scenery & Sunday outings. You cannot live that we may. We may, we must. We will. You are whom we vanquish, & how our God will praise us & bless us with eternal prosperity, with fruitful lands & newly married wombs. Our preachers gesture us toward these hoped-for days, a month & a year & a century after we have destroyed you, & others like you in this world about us, & others to come in other times. Preach will come fully & finally when you are each & every & all dead & we the blessed, we the people of the true god have no more fears to worry about when we walk our children in the park, pray in our houses of worship, gather for trade in our marketplaces. Ever & ever. All of you must die. Our true God allows us no other option ever as your false god says the same. Blood speaks one truth. Our God speaks one truth. Paradise builds from your graveyard.

Someone saw me the other night writing *Labyrinthine* at a McDonald's, locked into the music on my iPod Polly (Neil Young & Crazy Horse's new LP, *Colorado*).

"You writing a book?"

"Yah."



“About your life?”

“About life.”

It’s a hard question. *What is Labyrinthine?*

And so now to describe the June 25, 2011 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting, #117.

This is hard. I am now writing about an event that took place over eight years ago. It was a delightful event. I loved, & love, everyone who was part of it. Of those who were there, Jim Burke III is nearly eight years gone. Ric Amante & I are no longer friends, by his choice. Kassi & I moved from that small Arlington, Massachusetts apartment in 2013, to a house in another town in metro-Boston. Yet the magick of that night remains.

On my friend Polly iPod right now is playing the audio highlights of this meeting. Lavish, wonderful stretches of time of Jim playing his beautiful acoustic guitar—The Who, Neil Young, The Doors, The Beatles, & the like—in his beautiful mid-range voice.

Ric Amante reading “She’s Like a Rainbow” from *Cenacle 78*, the soft Boston undertone of his words, the delight in his listeners.

KD reading Neil Gaiman’s 2009 Newbery Medal acceptance speech, detailing the humility he felt when his seemingly healthy father suddenly passed, & the gratefulness he felt when fans tell him how much they love & value his work.

The birds chirping through the window of that small apartment we’d landed at upon arriving in Boston in 2010, all we owned in a U-Haul truck.

And Jim again, reading excerpts from his “hero” Henry David Thoreau’s 1854 book *Walden*, also published in *Cenacle 78*:

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? They have got to live a man’s life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well-nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and woodlot! The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh.

It is fitting that Jim read from this book, which he loved as much as his rock & roll music, during this last Jellicle Guild meeting he was fully present at. He spent many years as a young man haunting the woods around Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. He & I went there many times in more recent years; hiking, swimming, smoking high & talking.

One of the *Many Musics* poems from *Cenacle 78* that I read that night at the JG was “Another Way,” which I’ve mentioned here previously was inspired about a dream of Jim & me. He also liked the ending of this poem: “letting go of the map is hard, best chance.” He strummed a little to other poems of mine that night, like we’d done countless times before over the twenty-plus years we knew each other.

Maybe letting go the map is hard, best choice, but letting go of the love isn’t. I believe love, as honest & plain as can be, is a force in this world, as much one, if not far more durable, as bullets & dollars & prejudice & greed. When we love, now, what we see & feel around us, what we remember, what possibilities lure us smiling & curious into the future, our souls billow out full, oh-so-vulnerable yet infinitely vast. Love is the challenge, & the treasure.

Jim sang more Who songs, bright & potent, artstoned all the way even as we drank some good elixir that night too.

“Covers Hour” featured all of us reading pieces requested by people not able to be present. For example, I read from Sigmund Freud’s *Civilization & Its Discontents* on behalf of long-time friend David Hartley:

Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual’s dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.

Ric & Jim disagreed with Freud that humankind is by its nature driven to violence. “Freud has a cynical view of mankind in general,” said Ric. “Life is a constant evolution toward greater states of consciousness, & he wants to just say ‘the game’s done. This is how it is. I know.’”

More happily, Ric reads a funny, bright poem by his partner, Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor.

*Are you two feet on the platform
Wind, rain, earth, sun
Traffic sound and lights
Are you no longer waiting,
Just tapping, tapping,
lifting your heels, tapping?*

And KD reads a W.H. Auden poem called “Circe,” on behalf of dear old friend Ralph H. Emerson, frequent *Cenacle* contributor & JG attendee:

*With me, mistaught one, you shall learn the answers.
What is Conscience but a nattering fish-wife,
the Tree of Knowledge but the splintered main-mast
of the Ship of Fools?*

Then some faraway participants read for themselves, via recorded videos, what I sometimes call our JG “Field Trip.” Judih Haggai read her ’ku from *Cenacle 78*, her peacock poems accompanied by these bird’s forms & cries. Martina Newberry offered up her *Cenacle 78* poems too, in a video made by her videographer husband Brian.

Then, delight of delight of delights, Jim set to music the lyrics sent to me by Barbara Brannon, old friend & *Cenacle* artist, her first contributions to the JG since its last New Britain, Connecticut

meeting back on 12/28/2001. He had just looked at them that night.

*Ferry me over the white ocean foam,
Ferry me back from wherever I roam,
Come fetch me and bear me, no longer alone
Over the river, come ferry me home.*

Jim could do this, *just play*. He felt his musical way intuitively into the words, into the moment, as though he was *always playing* like the rest of us are always breathing. His music sounded as though composed, practiced, when in these magick moments it wasn't. He loved to quote Neil Young's response to a fan who cried out, "your songs all sound the same!"—"it's all one song!"

Ric read Joe Ciccone's strange lovely poem "Last Night" with persuasive warmth, praising the "killer" closing. Then KD read from Terry Tempest Williams' 1991 book *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family & Place*, about her fight to defend a bird conservatory, & also deal with her own "clan of one-breasted women," due likely to cancer caused by living in Utah:

I pray to the birds because they remind me of what I love rather than what I fear. And at the end of my prayers, they teach me how to listen.

KD closes with the book's opening poem, Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese," quite worth quoting in full here:

*You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.*

I read my *Notes from New England* piece, my year back in Boston. I came back, in part, to be nearer the people involved in this meeting, & could never have dreamed so many would be gone in one way or another from my life not long after.

Ric left about seven hours after coming; KD took a picture of Jim & him & me. After he went, Jim talked about his arthritic knees, & his inability to get disability for an operation. We talked on & on, & happily I have the audio recording for some of it. KD looked up his guitar's brand, out of his curiosity, & we talked at length about my LP collection, in crates along the wall of the living room. He told funny tag-saling stories. Marijuana, his various pains, visits to hospitals, his family's long-lived genes, & biking long distances as a young man, living near Walden Pond. "I'd like to live to hit 80 or



90,” he said.

Jim railed against the greed of corporations & Republicans. Talked about being unemployed, & the current recession. “I’m afraid something bad’s gonna happen.” I wonder what Jim would have said about the election of Donald J. Trump.

This was not the last time I saw Jim, nor the last Jellicle Guild meeting he came up for. But it was the last good one, as will be explained later in this chapter.

So Jim left the next day & I worked on getting *Cenacle 78* & *Scriptor Press Sampler 12* printed up & mailed off to its contributors & a few others. As I was working my pay-job daily, it took till the end of July to complete this task—ironically done on the last day of that job’s contract. I called Jim that day; we were both now unemployed.

So began a long stretching summer of joblessness. I did what I could to keep my sense of self while looking for work. This is hard because while unemployment pays the bills, it also does more. It defines one’s weekday daylight hours, where one spends them, who with, & doing what.

I rode my bike on the Minuteman Bikeway to Arlington Center. Spent my daylight hours at the library, at Starbucks, at a coffee shop called Jam’n Java. Often I biked further on to Harvard Square, to evening hours writing at my beloved Au Bon Pain Café courtyard.

KD & I went to movies on Saturdays as always. *Cars 2*, *Another Earth*, & *Apollo 18* were all excellent ones that summer. These seen after I did my 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution” radio show. Working all week toward getting SpiritPlants Radio’s weekend schedule of DJ shows & other content (news, rock, comedy, psychedelic lectures, jazz, & sometimes others). Doing this work kept me from closing into myself completely, kept me pushing.

We went to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston often, again for the Chihuly exhibition, & also for the *Degas and the Nude* exhibition. And to the DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts. I wrote lots of poems at all these places, staking my own sense of my self not on employment but on Art. From my notebooks:

Art, whatever it is, in truth, if there is a single one, or any at all, is my salvation . . . Whatever good I do here, by myself or others, will come from Art. It is source, & nothing convinces me otherwise. How well I do will come from how fully I transmute my life through Art—

We also went to live concerts around Boston. Saw the excellent Alison Krauss & Union Station at the Wang Theater where years before Jim & I had seen The Who’s great *Tommy* rock opera.

Not long after my job contract ended, we took a planned trip to stay at a little cabin in



Vermont. Lots of hiking, talking, driving around Vermont's gorgeous Green Mountains.

Along our way, we passed an abandoned farmhouse & its barns called Clover-Dale. Many overgrown acres of fields around an old house filled with debris, next to two old red barns, one tumbled over backwards.

The site of all this transfixed me. *Who had lived here? Why had they left?* We later researched this online. There were no answers at that time.

So I blended this sad abandoned site into *Labyrinthine*, decided to use my fixtion to contrive a story. Not facts, but fixtion. It gave *Lx* much to go with for pages & pages all summer. Helped me keep my self.

I was in touch with my mother because she had a health scare & I'd agreed to look after her, by phone contact, for a few days. We had some nice conversations. I gave her comfort. She was an old widow, living alone. I didn't know then that she was living a reclusive life that would kill her in a couple of years..

But it was her life to live &, at this point, her decisions really affected nobody but herself. Not in any vital way, like long ago. And she was too old to change. Like Trump, weird to say, though his decisions affect the world.

How does one *not become* too old to change? If neither a reclusive old woman nor a world famous old man could not avoid this, I can't know I will do any better someday.

Ric & I enjoyed a lovely stoned summer's day in the Great Meadows of Arlington, not far where I lived. Could I have foreseen that our friendship of so many years would begin to end only a few months later, what would I have done? I don't know. I have no easy answers.

I kept writing, kept job hunting, kept on. *Cenacle* | 79 | October 2011 was prime in my thoughts between job interviews that summer. I was writing poetry & fixtion & pushing & pushing. Radio show & movies on Saturday, after all week trying. Some days were good, some were shit. KD was her loving & supporting self every day along the way.

Some of my *Cenacle* writing time was spent on 2009 of this History, so I wasn't so far behind. Since Jim's death on December 1, 2011, I've managed to complete one chapter, 2010's. So it's taken me all these years to get to this point in recounting 2011. That's quite telling.

End of September, after two months of trying, I scored another technical writing contract. *Fucking finally*. I celebrated that news at my old writing joint, Eastern Coffeshop, ZombieTown, Mass., before going on to Ric's Out Loud open mic event to read some new work that night. So much fun that night.

Then spent a long lovely day before starting new job at the MFA, writing poems on every floor

of its buildings, & landing that evening at the gorgeous new Degas show. And wrote on & on.

In October, SpiritPlants Radio moved to Museter.com as its streaming platform. It was time, after three years of running the station, to do so. Also purchased the SpiritPlantsRadio.com domain name. KD & I now were responsible fully for keeping station going.

Reviewing my notebooks for October of 2011, I can clearly see how excited I was about many things. My new technical writer contract was going well so far. Because I did the work remotely on a laptop computer, this meant I had mobility to work at various places around Boston. I would pack up my book-bag, get on my bike, & ride to work—wherever I chose it to be that day.

I was working on *Cenacle* 79 with a fervor to do it well, a want to mix my poetry & fiction & press projects & radio into something bigger, criss-cross them in all sorts of ways. A year back in Boston, again employed; though none of my *Bags End News* project had been in *The Cenacle* yet, I dived into a review of its 26 years of notebooks, for renewed inspiration, & what might come from this.

As well, on September 17, 2011, a group of people decided to set up a protest camp in Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, to highlight the growing economic disparity worldwide, between the very wealthy & everyone else. Its motto was simple: “We are the 99%.”

Soon, countless people in towns & cities around the world had joined in this peaceful movement. I went down to Dewey Square, near the South Station transit terminal, to witness & support the people gathered & camped there, holding nightly meetings to discuss matters large & small.

I felt excited in many ways, like I’d done right in bringing KD with me back to Boston.

So I was thrilled with the next coming Jellicle Literary Guild meeting on October 29. Jim & Ralph were driving up from Connecticut. Ric & Zannemarie were both coming this time. Even my SPR DJ friend Jeremy Kilar (aka Catfishrivers) sent along a video of him performing his songs, since he couldn’t make it in person (like he had the previous December). And there would be quite a few proxy readings.

When Jim & Ralph arrived that Saturday afternoon, we planned to take an afternoon hike at Walden Pond. I loved every chance to get there with Jim (in addition to hearing him read from *Walden* at JG meetings). His favorite place, what saved his struggles.

That Halloween weekend a freak nor’easter hit the northeastern United States and the Canadian Maritimes, & cancelled that plan. It was the first of many things to go wrong over the next five weeks.

* * * * *

10/31/2019

Union Station

Hartford, Connecticut

Postscript commentary to this issue’s section of this chapter: I’ve been trying to write about 2011 for four years now, & counting. There was a point where I kept up, year by year, with my accounts (in 2005, I wrote in *The Cenacle* about 2004; in 2006, I wrote in *The Cenacle* about 2005; in 2007, I wrote in *The Cenacle* about 2006). But, recently, even before Jim’s sudden passing shook me to my ground, I’d lost that momentum. 2008 got written about in 2010; 2009 got written about in 2012; 2010 got written about in 2015. If lucky, 2011 will be finished in 2019.

I pushed at increasingly longer intervals to continue. Gathered my relevant 2011 notebooks & issues of *The Cenacle*, & had them in a helpful pile for months.

A year ago, I was down in Connecticut, like now, working on this chapter. Some months later, listening to the whole nine hours recorded from the 6/25/2011 Jellicle Guild meeting (described earlier). It all made me sad. Still does, but I decided on this trip down to CT that I would just *dive in, not stop, spend several days pushing*. Thus, I’ve reached October. I’m returning to Boston today, there’s

lots of *Cenacle* 109 work left to do before this Saturday's JG meeting.

Loaded the odds in my favor by coming down here, staying as usual at the Red Roof Inn in New Britain. Writing, editing, listening to material at the New Britain Public Library, Capitol Lunch, McDonald's, & my beloved Peoples Donutshop. Some magic medicine helped too.

It rained a lot this week. Calls about jobs switched my focus back & forth. I came down here jobless; luck on my side has changed that.

KD on phone & text messages her fine loving self. MSNBC on the hotel room TV every night reporting every little detail on the impeachment of Donald Trump. I wrote & wrote & wrote.

Cenacle 79 & the October JG & 2011's cataclysms will be told in the December 2019 *Cenacle*. I decided it was time to give this year its full due. More years will be described in 2020, & on, catching up one at a time.



* * * * *





Judith Haggai



intrusions
strange visitors enter dreams
whispering phrases

* * *

steps so silent
barely touch ground
invisible cloak

* * *

dream catcher
empty pockets
ready and waiting

* * *

smooth criminals
sneak out of my dreams
ground coffee alarm

* * *

this wild dawn
birds in syncopation
sapien silence

* * *

warm autumn kitchen
safe embrace of morning
promise of new book

* * *

october path
clouds of autumn dust
tinged with peanuts

* * *

one day's compassion
filters today's perspective
softer into morn

* * *

a song in my head
binaural beats
and I'm calm

* * *

on paper, autumn
in mind, curious kid
body, in between

* * *

time and distance
a bubble of prevention
may love overcome

* * *

when all is chaos
breathing in 4, out 4
smile and repeat

* * * * *



Same Moon Shining

[Memoir Excerpts]

The House He Grew Up In

Dad was an only child—and so am I—and so is my daughter Jillian (before her father remarried and had a son). Living without siblings can sometimes be lonely, and often a “lonely only” comes to depend on friendship to fill that gap.

Dad enjoys talking about his childhood friends, and the times they had together playing in and around the house in which he grew up, on the northeast side of Kansas City. When he discovered that we could virtually visit his old home (using the *Street View* tool of Google Maps/Google Earth), which is still there, and that we could go up and down the streets of his neighborhood, and find his friend’s houses as well, he was ecstatic.

“Can you zoom in on the front porch? How about the back yard?”

“Yes, we can.”

It’s wonderful that the house is still there, and that he grew up in that one place. My daughter has had a similar experience, growing up in the same city, at the same school, with the same friends. I don’t have a childhood home, really. I suppose I would call the apartment in Cullman one of my childhood homes, and the house on Penny Street in Scottsboro, and the house in Big Cove.

I’d never thought about going back to visit some of those places via Google Maps; I might do it soon. Occasionally, when I am in the area, I drive past the Big Cove house and wonder if my stepfather still lives there, and if there is anything of Mama’s left there that I could somehow retrieve—a little piece of her life to keep her near me.

When Dad and I visited Kansas City together in 2008, it had been fifty years since he had been home. His cousin Jack drove us over to East 8th Street so Dad could see the old house then, but we stayed only a few minutes—so being able to linger over the Google street view, and to copy and save images as photographs, has brought him joy.

In a way, going back to the house helps Dad heal from his estrangements. Though Clinton and Alma, Betty Jane and Leroy, and Dad’s stepmother Betty are all long gone, he can find them all and connect with them in some way by going back to the city where they all once lived, to the house where his adoptive parents brought him home. He can trace the path that he walked to school, go down to the train tracks, ride again his bike with friends, go into his old room with its toys and into the playroom downstairs.

In this way, an old man becomes a child again, and the parents he did not see for fifty years—the parents who died without him ever seeing them again—they move again and laugh in background of these places. Here are some of his memories of living on East 8th Street:

“The main thing about the playroom was, early on, Dad got me a train set. He built a table, and it took up almost the whole room. Later on, after I got tired of the train track, my little girlfriends, the one up the street named Pam, and then one way up on Independence Avenue close to the park, Patty, they would come down and we played doctor and nurses in that room. I liked Pam a lot, but Patty had dark hair, and she was the prettiest little girl I had ever seen at that time. Every time she came down to play, I thought I would go bananas. She didn’t want to be a girlfriend to me, just a friend, but

we had a lot of fun.

“My friend Gary Stallard came over some, too, but I don’t believe he played with the girls. We liked to build model airplanes and things like that. My other friends Gary Poole and Kenny Allen also lived on 7th Street. They didn’t come down to the house that much. We would ride our bikes everywhere, and they might play cowboys and Indians.

“There was a little hill there on the street, and we would run and have battles there. One time we was having a combat, and I had a stick, or one of us did, and I was running over there to attack the hill, and I either hit somebody with that stick, or somebody hit me, and it was pretty bad. We thought it was real. One of us got hurt, I forget.”

When Dad and I took a trip to Kansas City several years ago, we met up with Gary Stallard at a barbecue place called Little BBQ Joint in Independence. “Best barbecue I ever had, right there.”

He said that Gary Poole’s brother still lived in the house they grew up in. I think it was the second or third house up on 7th Street, where there was a crossing. His house was gray.

“He was born in Independence—it’s just up from Kansas City—, and his folks moved down to 7th Street when he was nine years old, about 1951 or so, and then we got to be friends. We played together all the time either at his house or mine. He had a sister named Sue; she played with us, too. I’ll never forget the time we was sleigh riding, and I got to ride with her, and we went down a hill together. That was so much fun. His father Jack worked in the railroad, and his mother was a homemaker.

“The living room was on the other side of Mom and Dad’s bedroom, then there was a dining room and a small kitchen. In my bedroom, up against the wall, there was a chifforobe, and another closet on the far side of the room. I had model airplanes and other kinds of models, my ball mitts, baseballs, footballs, basketballs, a lot of things I played with. My bed wasn’t very big, and it was up against the windows.

“When Albert lived with us, he was in the back room. The basement was where Clinton’s workshop was, up against the wall, with one big counter across, and had all of his equipment on that wall, his tools. He did most of his leatherwork on that table. There were two cherry trees in the backyard. There was also a very beautiful tree in the front yard, but it has since been cut down.

“I went in the service in 1960. After about two years, Dad and Betty moved to Mersington Avenue. There’s nothing there now where their apartment was. Just an empty lot.”

* * *

Something Useful to the World

Many people have considered suicide at one point or another in their lives. I have suffered from profound depression several times, and didn’t know whether I could go on. I thought about suicide daily for a few years once. On one occasion, when Mama had just gone in the nursing home, and I had suffered through a traumatic relationship with a meth addict, I couldn’t stop crying and finally went to the doctor. I’m so grateful that he helped me with a prescription for Zoloft. I felt better within three days.

I have heard people talk about the overmedication-for-depression crisis in the United States, but I want to go on record to say that Zoloft probably saved my life. Years later, when I was in another dark place, I checked myself into Three Rivers Behavioral Health Center. After one day, I wanted to leave, but I’m lucky the doctors insisted I stay for five days. I remember that I had no caffeine while I was there, got treated with a good medication again, and slept for the first time in what seemed like forever.

When I learned what had happened to my roommate to bring her to Three Rivers, I felt ashamed of my pitiful reasons for being there myself. The poor woman’s son had drowned his children and then killed himself. She was getting better and thought she could go on living despite the agony of

these losses, but she struggled with the horror of the idea that her son might go to Hell for what he did.

Her other son had told her he could not forgive his brother. In all of this, while we were together, she said gently to me, “Everyone’s sorrows are of great magnitude. We cannot measure them and compare them. Your sorrow is as important as mine and nothing to be ashamed of.”

Dad once threatened to kill himself when I wouldn’t talk to him or see him. I sent the police over for a wellness check, and then I was furious when he admitted to the cops that he would never kill himself—he just said that to get to me.

Another friend of mine, David, and I used to make macabre jokes about our suicidal tendencies. He would say, “I thought about killing myself today, but then I got interested in something on television,” or “I thought about killing myself today, but I made a sandwich instead.”

As we know from the tragic loss of comedian Robin Williams, one of the funniest people we ever had the privilege to know from a distance, and one of the most beloved, humor is often a way of deflecting sadness. I do it, too.

In Victor Boesen’s 1970 biography of Bill Lear, *They Said It Couldn’t Be Done: The Incredible Story of Bill Lear*, I found this passage: “In his \$8.00-a-week room at the St. George Hotel in Brooklyn, deeply in debt and seeing no way out, Lear considered jumping out the window. But death was so permanent. Pacing the floor, he tried to think of something useful to the world which he could supply.”

He eventually found about a hundred things to amaze us with. His example is one I try to follow. I believe that within each of us there are at least a hundred ways to be useful to the world, if we keep tending our talents, but sometimes we need help to get healthy enough to be able to trust ourselves. We should never make anyone feel ashamed of getting treatment, medication, therapy, whatever they may need. In seeking help, we are also allowing those ministers of good health to be useful to the world.

Sometimes we may need counseling to help us restore relationships, to be reconciled after an estrangement. Dad and I have benefitted from those services as well.

* * *

An Invisible Man

For many years, as I have written, my father was an invisible man to me. I wasn’t quite sure he existed or had a voice other than in memory. I knew his eyes had been blue, that he had been handsome and stubborn. I knew that I had halfway loved and halfway feared him, that he had divided me in two. It’s kind of a pitiful thing when a woman of fifty still wants to have been carried around in the pool by a father who was sunny, who would never let her drown—but how could an invisible man be a lifeguard?

Estrangement renders another person invisible; in a sense, it strips the mind even of memory. We will not look, nor hear, that person.

However, when my father was invisible, my own skin took on a ghostly tinge. When he was not a man, but a stereotype, who did not have his own broken story, my story was incomplete as well.

We can drown in shadows. The tooth that has been removed still aches, though it is now a cavity, like a phantom limb. My father existed for me in a list of what he had done wrong—how he had failed me, failed us. His name was an accusation.

Now he is a story that he has had a chance to tell. I can’t see a photograph of an old Chevrolet without picturing him in the passenger seat, laughing at his friend George Castleberry driving a hundred miles an hour, reaching out the window to light the cigarette of a passenger in another car, who also had his window down. An outrageous story, half-truth, but what is truth but memory and a good story?

I have been coating my father with flesh in these pages, have made him a real boy, have heard in him bassoon and drums, his own discordant song. But when the phone rings too often, and I pick up

to hear his familiar voice plagued with need, I still grow weary. I am drained by our continual struggle to understand each other, but I don't want to let him go. I won't. When one parent is dead, the other takes the stage, and in the parent's monologue we hear the tragic comedy of ourselves.

So, how do you make a father out of an invisible man? You start with your hammered heart, look deeply into it. You see that there are parts of yourself that are invisible, too, because you have hidden them. You see that you have been hypnotized by loss, and all that is necessary is to open your eyes again. The famous hypnotherapist, Michael Sealy, is known for saying, "All hypnosis is self-hypnosis," and I believe this to be true. We must choose what we will be hypnotized by rather than simply dancing to the Pied Piper of our old pain.

The process of healing estrangement, when it is possible, begins with rendering the other person visible again. Pretending someone does not exist is not helpful to the psyche, in my experience. The temptation to make my father invisible again has not disappeared.

I often write about disappearances. My bedtime stories are often podcasts about the missing. I search and search in my mind with the loved ones for their beloved invisibles. I have found mine; his eyes are still as blue as I remembered.

Sometimes, when I look into them, I discover the aching love I gave up longing for.

* * * * *



Martina Newberry



City

Everything in this place invites a search.

Look intently and you'll find tender surfaces
around and at the feet of the concrete
gods and goddesses of Los Angeles' creation.

Eucalyptus and palm trees are abundant.
Quilts of wild lilac cover some of the walls
of the freeways in colors that whisper of heaven.

The ever-so-unadorned sparrows frustrate the squirrels,
who skitter back and forth on the rails
of apartment patios and telephone wires.

Keep looking and you will see the furred stems of geraniums,
the willful bamboo stalks, and those glamour girls of the mallow family—
the *Summer in Paradise Hibiscus*.

The soft, silky voices of Latinos will tell you the prices
of coconut, mango, oranges, and pineapples—
resting comfortably in their glassed-in carts—
the beautiful brown of their hands will treat the fruit
with gentle guidance into paper containers.

In September, hot winds will introduce you to dark nights,
pierced by flames along the edges of far-away hillsides.
Ashes soft as the air they travel on
will coat your windshields in the morning—
leave your car in the driveway. Let the ashes be where they are for now.

This city seethes with *remember when*.
It simmers with celebrity, with gang violence, with art, with poems.
Choose your bus stops carefully, when you begin your search.
Be good to yourself here. Eat, sleep, stay as well as you can.

There is room for you here. In this city, you are perfect.

* * *

Smoking (A Love Song)

I miss smoking. The exquisite ritual of tapping,
lighting, staring off into the distance
while the first deep drag fills my body.

My father looked like Humphrey Bogart when he lit up,
and my sister Sabrina looked like Veronica Lake.
My other sweet sisters, Kate and Trish, looked like art photos.

"Fuck this!" has so much more *oomph* when you're holding
an English Oval, or a DuMaurier, or a gaunt Virginia Slim.

Forty years since my last, goodbye drag, still I dream of it.
I see myself, cool and thin, blinking through smoke,
holding the cigarette aloft with tapered fingers sporting painted nails.

I could avoid food when I smoked—
pared down to ninety-nine pounds one year.
Loose-tongued, throaty, mysterious, cool—
that's the image of me that formed when the smoke spiraled—
then cleared.

There was a man, an artist, fine-boned and sad,
who lit them for us after sex.
Paint on his fingernails added flavor, I thought.

He died shortly after we started our *affaire de coeur*.
Walked straight into a bus while reading a flyer
about a new art show opening.

Hell! I can't tolerate more wrinkles on this face—
especially around the mouth—
nor can I afford dark thoughts about dire diseases.

My hands have showy dark spots that I'd rather not display—
and the mystery that once was me is now revealed
in one hundred aging ways.

All that being said, I thank you, tobacco,
for those short years of charm and boozy dreams.

Though I no longer purchase cigarettes, inside I still smolder and burn.

Be on the lookout, World of Woe! I'm lighting up.

* * *

Typical

Let's say it is just a typical day for you.
 You've risen, stretched, then bathed,
 then dressed, and made coffee.

You open your front door to morning with a sky
 of arched clouds on a background of blue—
 clean, cool, pure.

On the third step down
 is an unremarkable pigeon feather,
 gray/white.

Out by the curb, a man is whistling
 as he goes through a dumpster,
 looking for plastics, paper, glass—
 there's refunds to be had from returns,
 and he will have them before it's noon.

There are dandelions in the grass.
 They have memorized your face, look up,
 wave to let you know that the morning is safe.

It's yesterday's morning
 and today's and tomorrow's as well.

Your coffee steams.
 The red-haired woman in a wheelchair rolls by,
 her Maltese in her lap.

You tell yourself you should go in.
 You lost a poem or two outside that door yesterday.
 It wouldn't do to lose another—
 they visit so seldom.
 Your work will suffer and be forgotten.

A phone rings.
 A boy on a bike races by.
 Two girls walk a pit bull up the street.

Let's say that, now, the day is busying itself—
your dark desk is waiting,
the lined notebook's waiting.

Your readers (both cats, black as shadows)
are waiting
and still you stay,
watching for something to happen,
which it will,
if you are still and without desire.

* * * * *





States of Mercy

[Excerpts From a Novel]

The Coast Guard patrol boat pulled away just after ten. By then the black lake and black sky formed a velvet drape over everything, patterned with sequins glittering in and out behind fast-moving clouds. The whites, reds, and greens of boat lights scattered along the horizon, far enough away that we couldn't make out which craft were moving and which were at rest like ours.

We'd promised the Coast Guard captain we were spending the night.

She treated us courteously, took down our names, looked over my license. "How much have you had to drink?" she asked, meaning all of us but looking straight at me.

I held out a hand toward the trash bag left on deck. It was filled with empty bottles, and a lot of those were mine.

The captain sniffed the air, twitching her nose like a rabbit. "I don't smell any drugs."

"No drugs," I said. "Just beer."

"OK, but you know you shouldn't be skirting around out here, the state you're in."

"I know."

"It's all right," Mercy assured her. "We're not leaving this spot."

"You're staying put?" Again, she looked at me.

Mercy fielded the question. "We'll sleep it off." Even after all the booze, she seemed sober enough to be in full control of her words. "I promise you, we're here until sunrise." She paused a moment to look around. "It's such a beautiful night, don't you think?"

The captain took her eyes off me and glanced around as if she were contemplating the absent horizon for the first time in years, or the stars for the first time ever. It wasn't nostalgia. It was pure experience like a child's first trip to the zoo. She smiled. "All night," she mumbled.

"All night," Mercy agreed.

"Good." The captain shook her head, forcing herself to focus. Looking at me again, she said, "That's what I like to hear. You seem to know what you're about, and I don't suppose you'll cause any trouble if you stay put until first light."

"We're good to go," said Mercy.

"I suppose you are." She looked at me less coldly, but I still didn't see a hint of a grin at the corners of her mouth. "I've got your name, so if anybody stops you tonight you'll be in real trouble. We clear?"

"It's cool," I said.

"Cool," she said, repeating the word and not making it her own.

"Have a beautiful night," said Mercy.

"Beautiful," said the captain. A minute later we were watching her motor off into the darkness, another light among the mirrored stars.

"That was close," said May.

"No," Mercy assured her. "It's a beautiful night. Nothing bad happens on a beautiful night like this, not to anyone just out being a part of it. That's us."

"You think?" said May.

"That's us." Mercy pictured the whole story in her head like a writer dreaming up *Dr. Zhivago* or *War and Peace* while struck numb in a long, hot shower. She saw where we came from and where

we were headed. Something about the light reflecting in her eyes told me she'd had a vision. It might have been no more than a glimpse of the Z from her *T equals Y plus Z*. She welcomed it, took it into her, and grinned.

I wanted to ask what she'd discovered, but I hesitated and the moment passed.

"Another beer?" said May.

"You know it," said Mercy.

"Another beer?" May said to me.

"Right," I agreed. "No point sobering up now."

An hour later we were holding May's head and stroking her hair while she threw up over the side. The waves had turned choppy, ocean-like, and a cold night wind was rocking us in a loping yaw.

"Goddamned waves," May groaned. "Goddamned night! Goddamned lake!" A typhoon of ugliness poured out of her, and the more she cursed nature and the heavens, the more the boat rocked as though with indignation of its own.

"Easy, easy," Mercy cooed.

"Goddamned easy!" came the reply.

Mercy massaged May's tense shoulders.

I brushed her cheek with a wet cloth.

May retched and spat out amber streams. "Goddamned beer!" she moaned.

I stroked her hair, felt its strands stiff with dye.

She tilted her head up toward me, eyes squinting and puffy with red, lips caught somewhere between a sneer and a smile. As I petted her gently like a kitten, she responded with the briefest sigh as if to thank me. Then she turned toward the bouncing water and dry-heaved. "Goddamned everything!" she grunted.

I ran my hand down her tight, tiny back, fingertips finding the groove of her spine. They lingered there, feathering up and down.

"It's all right," said Mercy. "Take a deep breath."

"Shit," said May. "Fucking fuck!"

It went on like that for another twenty minutes before May got her insides under control. The wind calmed, and the water with it. May found a touch of calm as well.

"You're okay," Mercy said. "Let's get you cleaned up." She nodded for me to stay here. Some things women don't want a man to see, like the transformation from ugliness to beauty.

I nodded back, then looked away so they could slip below deck without me watching. I glanced around until I saw my half-empty beer bottle. I almost reached for it, but the image of May throwing up over the side stopped me. *Goddamned beer*, I thought.

It's then I realized just how drunk I was. I'd gone beyond the tingling, the flush, the dizziness, to the point where I felt comfortable with my new condition. Every step came slowly and seemed to cover a mile without getting me anywhere. "That's enough for tonight," I mumbled. I sat down and leaned back against some panels, then stared at the stars for a while until I felt as though I were among them.

* * *

When Anderson Weeks walked into our empty bar a few days after Christmas, he brought us each a gift: a gold cross on an ankle chain like the one May wore. He wasn't at all what I expected. He looked like neither a prophet nor a lunatic. He wore a tailored blue-gray suit like a mobster's. His short hair, slicked back with gel and neatly cropped, was the reddish orange of Irishmen on TV—not at all like Mercy's flaming red, but more like rust. He had a wiry face, pale and smooth, with no five o'clock shadow, no moles or scars. His eyes were green as traffic lights, deeply penetrating and mysterious. The

hand he held out to shake mine was longer than normal, and soft too, with giant, stretching fingers. His other, which he kept at his side, bore his only blemish: bobbing beside the pinky, the fleshy stub of a single bone like a sixth finger that hadn't formed all the way. "May's told me so much about you," he said, while my hand lingered in his.

"She had lots of good things to say about you, too."

His smile was the most messianic thing about him. Its sincerity and kindness should've come accompanied by harps. "I'd hope so," he said. "I'm just a peaceful man. I'd never say a mean word or do a hurtful thing if I could avoid it." When he released his grip, he shook Mercy's hand and said, "I hear you're the oracle of Frozen Orange."

She laughed, her laughter less sincere than his grin. "I'm no oracle."

"Spiritual leader then," he said.

"Hardly that," she said. "I'm just a woman trying to find her own answers."

May spoke up. She stood by Weeks's side, dressed in the same black fatigues she'd worn the last time. "Don't listen to her," she said. "She's trying to be modest. She's the most spiritual person I've ever met besides you."

"High praise indeed," said Weeks.

The three men standing several feet behind him all wore black outfits like May's, along with the beret and ankle bracelet, though unlike May the men each wore tasseled black loafers that seemed out of place, and a leather shoulder holster with some sort of handgun strapped into it. They were like soldiers camouflaged for night instead of the jungle.

"Mister Weeks," I said, "I don't mean to be rude, but we don't allow any kind of weapons in the bar. You know how it is. I hope you understand."

"They're fully licensed in this state," he said.

"That's cool, but we can't make an exception. It's just not good business to have guns in a bar. If they'll remove the guns, we'll stash 'em behind the counter where they're safe."

"I can't do that," he said. He looked back at his men. They wore blank expressions like statues, not flinching even though we were talking about them. "They're my bodyguard. I've had death threats. I get them all the time. One maniac even shot at me once. I was in . . ."

"May told us the story."

"Oh," he said. "Then you understand, I take these guys wherever I go. They're licensed to carry firearms in eighteen states."

"That's all well and good," I said, "and I appreciate your situation, but . . ." I gestured around the empty room. "as you can see, we don't have a single customer. Nobody'll hurt you. Besides, we're not bad people here in Frozen Orange. I doubt you'll find any trouble."

His lips scrunched like shoulders shrugging. He looked at his men, at Mercy as if she might override my demands, then back at me. "I really can't do that," he said. "You never know where trouble comes from. It just comes. They protect me." He paused, probably hoping I'd concede the point. When I didn't say anything, he offered, "What if I ask them to stand outside? Would that be OK? They can watch me from the street."

"Hmm. I guess that'd be cool. Just ask 'em not to huddle in front of the door. Business is bad right now, and I'd hate to scare off the one customer that might really need a drink tonight."

"Sure." He turned to Mercy and asked, "That OK with you?"

"It's fine. Would they like some coffee or a soda?"

"That'd be great, thanks." He looked at his men. "Let's see, I'm sure they'll want two coffees black, and one decaf with creamers. That is, if you have decaf . . ."

"I can make some," she said.

"Thanks so much."

"Tell 'em I'll bring those out in a minute."



The four of us were sitting around a table when Dirk Jones walked in. He was one of our regulars, a scrawny thirty-something with a receding blond hairline, square-framed glasses, and a dimple the size of a nickel. He looked like a lunatic in his yellow and blue ski parka, matching pants, and ocean-blue moon boots.

“Hey, Mercy,” he said, stopping beside our table, “what’s with the clowns out front?” He sounded equally angry and sarcastic. “Thought you’d been raided by the ATF or something. Those guys are real assholes. One of them tried to make me open up my coat like I was wearing a bomb or something.”

Mercy and I both turned to Weeks who tilted his head to the right in a gesture of deference. She didn’t scowl like I did, though. She said, “What’d you do, Dirk?”

“Whatcha think I did? Told ’em all to go to hell. Ain’t nobody laying that trip on me when I’m just minding my own business, going to my favorite juke joint for a beer. Jesus Christ, if I wanted a hassle I’d go smoke a joint in the bushes behind the police barracks.”

“Sorry about that, Dirk,” I said. “It won’t happen again. Special occasion tonight. We have a guest.” I nodded toward Weeks.

“Who’s he?” Dirk asked, talking about Weeks the way parents talk about their children, as if not even there. “No movie star I ever saw, and he’s not the by-God president, that’s for sure.”

“Dirk,” I said, “meet Anderson Weeks.”

Weeks stood slightly and held out his hand. Dirk ignored it, leaving Weeks standing hunched over like a fool. “Never heard of him. He some kind of soap star or something?” He finally took a hand from his coat pocket and slapped it against Weeks’s like a high-five.

“You haven’t seen him on the news?”

“Looks kind of like that queer fellow who killed and ate his boyfriends. You’re not him, right?” He wiped his hand on his parka before sliding it back into a pocket.

“No, my friend. I’m not him.”

“Then I never heard of you.” He paused. “So Mercy, can I get a beer?”

“Sure, Dirk.” She got up, said, “Excuse me,” and headed for the bar. Dirk followed her without so much as a goodbye.

“That was so weird,” May said. “That guy is so weird. He’s really never heard of Anderson before? I don’t believe it.”

“Probably not,” I said.

Anderson shrugged with his eyes.

May said, “I’ve never seen that happen. I’ve seen people freak out, get upset, start screaming, but nobody’s ever drawn a blank.”

Weeks leaned over to her and slid his hand onto her back, rubbing gently as though comforting her. When he pulled away, he told her, “That’s why we have to keep fighting to get our message out, to show the whole world what we’re about.”

“What are you about?” Mercy asked, reclaiming her seat.

May answered for Weeks. “We’re sharing our vision of the Buddhist Christ. We want everyone to recognize the serenity of God, not the Old Testament wrath or the saving souls and fiery pits of the New. We teach peace and meditation, the true spirituality of the Holy Spirit.”

“Well said,” Weeks agreed. Then, to us, he added, “May’s one of my top Knights. She knows her stuff and how to say it. She’ll make a fine Bishop someday when we start to franchise.”

“Sounds like a Starbucks religion,” I joked.

He didn’t laugh or turn his lips upward. Instead, his eyes squinted with seriousness. I thought I’d offended him. Then, with a dry, flat tone devoid of humor, he said, “Never, never take the holy Starbucks name in vain.”

It took us all a moment to filter out the intensity of his voice and catch the gag. May seemed shocked. She glanced at him with raised eyebrows as though she’d never heard him tell a joke before.

Mercy broke out laughing first. I joined in, after which Weeks finally cracked a smile. May held out the longest, shaking her head when she caught on at last.

“Good thing I didn’t say McDonald’s,” I joked.

“Only a few hundred served so far,” Weeks replied, more jovial this time. “But I have ambitions. You think I could get a billion customers if I put up a bright yellow W?”

“Don’t know. What kind of fries do you serve with God?”

“That’s about enough of that,” said May. “You’ll go to hell for jokes like that.”

For a moment, I thought she was joking. “Sorry, I get carried away with my heresy.”

“We all have our problems,” Weeks said. “At least you’ll go to hell laughing.” He sounded serious again, and this time I couldn’t tell how he meant it.

An intimidating silence fell over our table, the dialogue dying in quiet while the four of us sipped our drinks, looked at one another and looked away. The only sounds were the low hum of a radio playing pop songs and the loud voice of Dirk muttering to himself: “. . . crazy woman. Think I want to be left alone. Think I want her sleeping around. She don’t know what thigh-highs is for, she don’t know what make-up’s for . . . I’ll teach her a thing or two. You know what I’d like to do with her? I’d like to go down to the railroad tracks. I got a friend in Memphis. Drives a taxi. She’ll show you a thing or two. She’ll rock your world. She’s a foreign girl. Can’t understand half what she says. No sir, and wish I couldn’t understand a word. But she keeps talking . . .”

May broke the awkward silence at last, leaning in and whispering, “That guy needs help.”

“Dirk’s got some problems,” Mercy agreed.

I added, “He gets more rational as he drinks.”

“He needs help,” May said again.

Weeks placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Help him.”

Her expression seemed a hodgepodge of uncertainty and hope. “You mean right now?”

“Why not? You’re a Knight. A Knight’s job is to help those who need it. You said you believe he needs help, so it’s your duty to go and help him.”

Their eyes locked for a long pause. He reassured her, “Be firm but kind. Be loving but just. Trust your instincts and listen well.”

She kept his gaze until she couldn’t hold it any longer. Then she nodded and stood up, the chair sliding away from her like his hand. Without a word, she turned and headed for the bar. We followed her with our eyes, watching as she approached Dirk, took a stool beside him, smiled brightly and spoke an introduction. We couldn’t hear most of what she said, but we saw her nod, gesture, change her expressions to fit whatever she was telling him.

Dirk spoke more loudly, his replies reaching us clearly. “You some kind of Jehovah’s Witness or something? Don’t go ministering to me, lady. I’m not interested in that drivel.” He got angry at first, then loosened up, nodding back and forth at her and smiling. “That’s true,” he said. “That too.” He went from pointing a finger to holding both hands calmly on his drink while he listened. “Yeah, I guess so. I love her’n all that, s’just I don’t want to marry her.”

I told Weeks, “If she converts him, I’ll buy you dinner.”

He grinned. “She’s not trying to convert him. We don’t do conversions. People have to make up their own minds and come to us. What we do is exchange ideas and make connections between our lives and the lives of those we want to help. She’s giving advice right now. That’s all.”

“He’s on the crazy side,” I said. “I doubt he’s interested in advice from a stranger.”

“We’ll see, won’t we? Just wait.”

May kept talking, and Dirk listened. When he replied, his voice was quieter, not quite reaching us anymore. Their conversation passed in silence. Then May stood up, leaned over and embraced him tightly, pressing both hands into the back of his parka. Dirk was stunned. He resisted at first, tensing and trying to draw back. With the stool and the bar keeping him there, he stopped struggling and returned the hug, slowly lifting his arms.

“Amazing,” I said.

Mercy asked, “Did you teach her that?”

Weeks shook his head. “She’s a natural. I’m told she learned her empathy from you.”

“Me?” said Mercy.

“That’s what I hear. That’s what she tells me.”

States of Mercy had absorbed another dozen regulars. Mercy took up her customary spot behind the bar, taking orders and mixing drinks. Weeks seemed less interested in talking just to me, so I encouraged him and May to move up to the bar. He glanced at his watch as though in a hurry to leave, but he didn’t argue. I offered him a drink, but he turned it down.

“Body’s a temple, eh?”

He gave me that shrug with his eyes. It seemed to say, *I can tell you don’t mean anything by it, so I won’t take offense.*

I was getting curious. I wondered what pushed his buttons, what really made him angry or threw him off his stride. Nothing affected him, and that made him almost mystical.

I tested him more bluntly. “I think I read somewhere that you’re considered a cult leader.”

He didn’t flinch or scowl. His head never tilted or moved to avoid my gaze.

“Does that bother you?”

“Why should it? All religions are cults in the eyes of the uninformed. Christ was a cult leader, you know. That’s how he was perceived in his time. In a way, so were Buddha and Mohammed and Zoroaster and, this is off the point I guess, but so was Socrates. Of course, I’m not comparing myself to them. That’d be absurd.”

“Right,” I agreed, sounding more cynical than I’d intended.

May grimaced, but Weeks appeared not to have noticed my tone. “But I also won’t let myself be compared to Jim Jones or that wacko who believed in castration and Nikes and had his followers kill themselves so they could meet the mother ship coming with . . . What was that comet’s name?”

“Hale-Bopp,” I said. “I remember that.”

“Right. I’m not like that guy, if anyone, I’d have to say I’m more like the guy who wrote those science fiction novels.”

“Hubbard,” said May.

“Him.”

“Is that good or bad?” I asked.

“Depends on who you ask. He wasn’t a god, and he wasn’t a psycho. He just took old ideas about spirituality and psychology and worked them together in a way people could understand them. Sure, what he taught became a religion of sorts. But he was just a man with a message.”

“That’s how you see yourself?” said Mercy, joining the conversation with two whiskey bottles in her hands. “A messenger?”

“Yes, that’s how I see myself, and how I hope other open-minded people will see me.”

“Do you think there are enough of them out there?”

“Enough what?”

“Open-minded people.”

“These days,” he assured her, “there are more than enough.”

“What do you mean these days?” I asked.

“The new millennium,” he said. “Men and women always look for spiritual answers at the turn of a century, and a thousand years makes it all the more pressing. They wonder about where they are and where they come from, not to mention where they’re headed.

“The new millennium will bring a whole *Ripley’s Believe It Or Not* of strange phenomena, confusion, chaos, and wonder. Men and women will see things—the same things they would’ve seen any other year, only now they’ll pay attention, look for meaning. I just want to add what I can to help

them find it.”

He stopped for a second, looking around. Then, picking up again, he said, “Have you noticed that these days the word ‘God’ pops up in pop songs as often as ‘love’ or the million names young people have for sex? Songwriters invoke the spiritual because it’s on their minds right now, and on the minds of their listeners.

“They praise God and condemn him, admit to him and deny him, attack him, and plead for his embrace. Atheists and worshippers alike have been pulling him into their music. And these aren’t hymns I’m talking about. I don’t mean the stuff you’ll hear on Christian radio. These are hard-edged rock songs, raps, alternative styles, everything.”

I nodded, trying to hear the songs he meant in my head.

“Pay attention to your surroundings. You’ll find a rebirth of interest all around you. It’s everywhere you look. You can’t miss it.”

“You think so?” said Mercy.

“I’m sure of it. Just a couple weeks ago I was on campus at the University of Cincinnati. I saw a young girl, about nineteen, sitting outside on a park bench in the cold. Her gloved hands clutched a worn copy of Jack Kerouac’s *Dharma Bums*. I stopped and asked her if she liked the Beats or if that was something she had to read for class, and she said, ‘Neither one.’ She told me one of her friends recommended it because she was having a sort of spiritual crisis. She didn’t elaborate, but I got the distinct impression she’d just started to doubt her religious convictions.”

“Ah,” I said, just to say something.

“I kept her talking,” Weeks continued. “I always like to hear what young people have on their minds when it comes to the spiritual. I asked her if she liked the book, if she thought she understood it well enough, and if she found it as helpful as her friend had suggested.”

“What’d she say?” Mercy and I asked at the same moment, surprising us both at how wrapped up we were in this simple anecdote.

“She responded with a great line, one I plan to use because it fits so perfectly. She said, ‘It’s not too bad. Not too bad at all. There’s such a mix of perspectives. I think it shows there’s a place for Zen serenity even for a Catholic girl like me.’” Weeks paused, then repeated the last line with total austerity in his voice. “Even for a Catholic girl like me.”

* * *

The New Year’s party brought our biggest crowd of the old year, and possibly the next. The bar filled up with people drinking, kissing, and dancing on the counters. Folks sang songs and batted around black and white balloons as they deflated and fell from the ceiling. I wasn’t a good enough musician to play for a crowd like this, so Mercy and I booked a three-piece out of Pittsburgh. The group, which called itself Generic Bar Band, played covers of funk, folk, vintage rock, and a stray punk song here and there. They knew lots of Grateful Dead tunes and plenty of interpretations of Rusted Root, the favorites where they were from.

Mercy and I worked the bar together, while Christina, our new employee, checked IDs and stamped hands. She was a last-minute hire, something else that had to be done for a night like this. We also brought our TV down from the apartment so folks could watch the countdown.

It was a hectic night, completely maddening, with little time to breathe and none whatsoever for dialogue during the festivities. We had one minute of peace the entire evening, half before and half after the clock hit midnight. We didn’t know what to do with ourselves. Having no one to kiss, we kissed each other, pretending to be lovers again for just that pause. Then we each slammed a shot of whiskey and a glass of cheap champagne, our only drinks during the party.

“Crazy day,” said Mercy.

I smiled, savoring the taste of her lips fruity with sherbet punch. “It’s wonderful, isn’t it?”

The band hadn't made it through a full chorus of "Auld Lang Syne" before worn green bills were flashed our way and new drink orders needed to be filled. The customers went mad—so mad I wished I could've stood there watching while they raved drunkenly, dancing and stripping off outer layers of their clothes. I caught glimpses of couples making out, but their gyrations were only flashes I saw as I moved around from one end of the bar to the other.

The partiers seemed to enjoy themselves. But they were afraid, too. They'd been tortured for months with news about the Y2K bug and all the horrible disasters likely to happen. Every so often I heard someone wondering aloud if the power plants had melted down or airplanes had fallen from the skies like zapped mosquitoes.

The anxiety came to a head around one-thirty. It was our only scare of the night. A girl in the crowd panicked, screamed and, in the tense silence that followed, told everyone her mother just called and said CNN had reported an accidental launch of a Russian nuclear missile that had been shot down over the Pacific. "Not funny," several in the crowd moaned. An Armageddon of bees circled the room, buzzing loudly and mocking the girl for her lousy sense of humor. But all of us soon recognized the fear in her eyes and knew she was serious. So the whole bar stilled while we checked CNN.

The anchors said nothing about missile launches. Instead they talked about celebrations and people going wild in the streets. The fiery images CNN displayed were outlandish waves of fireworks tearing up the night in Paris, London and the District of Columbia.

As the crowd went back to its mad tectonics, Mercy repeated herself: "Crazy day."

At last, we were sure nothing had changed. The sun would still rise as always over people racing their cars along the highway, houses where old women were tucked away under their electric blankets, lonely men walking their dogs without ambition, and all the general this and that of a day in the life of America. Nothing changed. Nothing except the calendar and a few expectations. All the rest was as it had been, except without excitement and dread from the months before.

"Crazy day?" I said to Mercy, grinning.

"Crazy day," she replied. "Tomorrow we get to clean up all the mess."





Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*“Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass.”*

—The Shins, “For Those to Come,” 2003.

lx. One, Many, None Unitive [DRAFT REMIX]

*“Neither death nor dream
are truly a remote land.”*

“One, Many, None”

i.

Remember some things. And better,
& different, deeper cool beneath,
warmer flesh to their images & noise.
It’s what I’ve returned to the this Island
to do, re-braid my selves, long old gaps
with new sparks to light up & fuse.
Grasp that girl in me, & go, hereon, better.

I’ve lived long times at the Pensionne,
tended its wild gardens, visited
with the White Tiger. Apprenticed by
his kindly Sea-blue eyes, the growling
wisdom in touching his black & white fur.
He helped me stop running from my
lost home, the King my father, my dear
friends in dreams, so many loves.

When dreams came, as long they
hadn’t, they were of the this Island,
& the Architect asking me to return,
to find him in the Tangled Gate.
My body asweat in these dreams,
the yearns of my hips & breasts,
hands & lips. To tame him, to burn
him, to drown him in me, to save
him atwist my limbs, mine, beg me,
beg me, love me, my own.

Yet we argued. Hearts like fists.

“Why now?”

“You’re needed.”

“You wouldn’t let me in the Gate
when I lived there. When you
were my master.”

“~~You’d been~~ traveled ~~to~~ the Gate, anyway,
many times; I knew this then.”

“What did you know?”

His face plain upon me now, his spectral
grey eyes within my own, touching
me in ways my own hands could not,
possessing me like my hardest breaths,
shaping me like a poem from
a mound of moss.

“I knew then, I know now, that
the deepest truths of a human heart
is are in its yearns. When you came
to me, you were forbidden travel
in the Gate. I allowed you maps
to study, & you traveled there by
in your dreams; & I only allowed you maps to study. These passing years have had
to pass, time bound you deeper to the Gate by absence & wish.”

“Now you bid my return?”

“Ask the White Tiger.”

I never find him but he is before me,
head sunk low ~~sunk~~ for an embrace.
Always the gardens, I’ve never seen
him elsewhere, nor enter it, nor exit.

Not my master, Creatures never do,
but a teacher, my **tender**. He taught
me in every way possible what tenders I
most needed to know: *kindness most*
binds. I often resisted sometimes the
far ends of his teachings, when
kindness seemed second to
self-preservation, or revenge.
A shake of his mane, a correcting
growl. He insisted me. Pressed me again & again.

Kindness most binds. Many ways
to heal. He would not deny my dreams
of the Architect, neither nudge me
along nor tug me back.

~~Of my dreams he would only say there are many
ways to heal, not just the tender's way.~~

~~"I have to leave, don't I?"~~

Quiet growling deep in his throat.

Learning is about making better choices.

Kindness most binds. Many ways to heal.

"Come with me."

Silence. ~~We would meet again in some way.~~

His Our last embrace ~~made that clear:~~ till our next one.

ii.

~~Remember~~ My travels since have brought me
to this road, to an obscured
understanding of what I am.

My heart's strange wants against
an endless canvas of strange stars.

Not knowing how to know
where I begin or end in space & time.

We approach a kind of temple now,
it is hardly dawn. A temple,
or a cave, I cannot tell. I find my way forward in tThe crowd
is easy lets me press forward,
like expecting me, waiting me,
wanting me.

A tall, feathered hierophant faces me.
There is silence. Does he expect words?

His words like a bow.

~~"I expect nothing. I wait your will."~~

"Will I find my answers in there?"

~~He~~ Shakes his head, another kind of bow.

~~as thought~~ Like I asked the color of ~~mine~~ my own eyes.

He steps aside, & I walk toward
the ~~door leading in:~~ the entrance, dark as its own shadow.

~~Aside the door,~~ There is a basin of water, insisting
a ~~splash,~~ a drink. Like ~~I think of~~ the Fountain long
back there, I nod. ~~s~~ Splash, drink.

Enter, not knowing if I will return.

For a moment, blind blackness,
shadow's shadow, nor the feel of the
ground ~~under~~ beneath my feet.

I breathe slower, do not cry out,
just a little hmmm to calm,
perhaps invite. Something tests me.

I reach within me, strange girl's
strange heart, nudge up my humming,
sniff too for any clue. Images emerge
 & hang about me.

I see the book of patterns my father
the King & I would study, contrive
 deeper ways contrive to my dances at first light
 & ~~sing of the waking dreams:~~ their waking songs of dream.

What was this book? I reach out
 to touch it, turn its frail pages,
 there is something here I know,
 these are gnatterings rudely writ!
My friend the Imp's playful
ur-tongue, yet wisps of words to
my touch, I touch a page, fragile as a wisp,
~~& words like~~ "there is no final thing
 to know" lay upon my brow, crown
of vine & stones, clue & thread.

iii.

Follow the thread, half turn, & there
 my brother, whom I loved so closely dearly,
 finding me disconsolate that I would
 not see my friends again, listening
 to me tell of their world in
dreaming caverns & tunnels underneath
the Tangled Gate, their ways, nNever a denying
 word, just this: "You will limp
 now as I sometimes do. But not always.
 You will find each other again."

Another half turn & my friend
 who claimed my father the King's
 heart, made off like a preying bandit.
 I see them together in the chamber
 they alone used. Her straddling atop him,
 dark hair down, hips moving impossibly
 slow, head reared back in snarl,
in growling long wide as forever
 as she sucks him into her, deep
 into her, till nothing seems to remain,
 now leaving the room, nude, him
 recomposing in the blood & sweat
~~falling~~ trashing from her walk along ~~as she~~
~~walks~~ the empty corridor, him an
 old ~~splayed~~ man, splayed remains, &
 her gone completely.

I press myself ~~harder~~ deep into this darkness,
 command to know, & now I am small,
 hardly made, singing to rags &
 flower vases *because they sing to me,*
we are alike. I try to recall
 earlier but it's like I wasn't born,
 never an infant. Created like a
poem from moss, an animate statue, no couple loved
 me to be. The King not my father,
 nor his dead first Queen my mother.

I tire. What do I do here?

There are wisps of song, of a kind
 with my despairing, I reach ~~toward~~ them
 & they settle on my outstretched
 finger like a hummingbird.

Singing, "Many kinds of time, several
 binds of time, & how it looses to air!"
 I think of the Architect, & the singing
 molds his face in the dark before me.

iv.

"You've come."
 "You've led."

I feel soft pressings against my arms
 & shoulders. My friends! ~~I can feel~~ Soft fur
 of the White Bunny, a tiny imp's ~~shape~~, a turtle
 not a turtle. So close to me.
Heartbeat. Breath. Skin. Hmmming.



"Do I finally learn what all of you are?"

"You created us. You do every time
there is a new world."

They crowd close to me, even the
Architect is not far.

"Why don't I remember?"

"You always say because failure is
an imperfect teacher, & hope
opens hands the best. We are your hints
of elsewhere, of others. All you will
allow yourself."

"Is this world failure then? Do I lead
the procession out there to a new one
again?"

"Here is a choice."

"What choice?"

"Stay. Fill the hole in the heart of the world.
Bind the Gate here, to serve as foundation
to all."

"Why haven't I chosen this way before?"

"I convinced you," says the Architect,
with a deep heart's whimper. "I believed
we could make a world without flaw."

u.

There is silence. I drift from my friends,
wander memories that seem feel departing.
The sweet, high music of the Traveling Troubadour.
The darkling fancied dark fanciful music of the One Woods
when all wake deep in the night & cry out.

My father the King on sleepless nights,
his spyglass upon peering the black water.
The demon tugging him back, away from me,
away from the Queen, willing to sacrifice
my brother, the snakebite in his heart never
letting him rest until our Island home abandoned,
& all to war[?]. Never seeing her slip back
into the sea as his boats raised their sails.

My blue bag. The many threads. I begin
to fear. How do I know a flawless world
can't be found? I twist in, & in, & in,
feel myself starting to pull this world
closed upon itself, its possibilities, even
as glints & glarings of a new one nose me near.

I fear. Words are leaving. This is what
 they do. *No!* (leaving) *No!* (leaving)
 I try to cry out *help me!* but it's just a
 silent wordless grunt. *No!* (leaving)

Try again, the world shaking, the Beast &
 its mate together, comforting at this.
~~once again known end.~~ *Failure. Pain.*

No! (leaving) *No!* (leaving) *N-!* (leav-) *N-!*
(gnatter) (N!) (gnatter!) (N!) (gnatter! gnatter!)
No! Help me, Architect! My friends! Beast!
Hero! My brother! My father-the King! Help me!
White Tiger! Singer! Troubadour!
Help me! (No!) (gnatter! gnatter!)
Help me, Queen! Help me, all!

A great roar, a wild pain, I feel blown
 all to light, cry soundlessly, & then
 all silence. Silence.

Then a voice, my own, & yet I listen:
"There is a door, & now we pass through.
There is a door. And now we pass through!"

vi.

The world spasms. The world shakes.
 The world holds. I reach into its maw
 & fill it with everything I've ever learned,
 ever known.

I bind myself to this world, its flaws,
 its beauties. I push time back, smooth it
 like a thin blanket ~~along~~ across a long, ~~long~~ bare back.
 It is there for those not ready to reveal
 themselves to the night & its many kinds of truths.

I push back, growing stronger, healing all I can,
 there is so much, & the world will ever
 root up its song ~~in part~~ from its countless fractures,
 how they chorus.

My efforts tire me, & I feel my friends
 join me, gather me close, lift me up
in humming at my back, help me push this world,
 keep this world, arriving, *arriving now*, *arriving*
~~somewhere to something~~, close, *closer*, more, *& more*, & a push,
 & ~~now~~, good, it's . . . water. *Sea water!*
My beautiful world's Wide Wide Sea.

I am in mid-dive into the Sea, my things
 tied about my waist, bidding my friend
 goodbye with a wave, this time I see his face true,
 it is the Hero, my dear friend, smiling
 at me as once I had at him, *thank you,*
I love you, thank you, & goodbye.

The shore is rocky, no beach where I half-
 collapse, breathless. The sea will let me
 leave ~~but willing~~ this time, guarding by my blood hereon.
 I have bound myself to this world.
 I have remembered some things & bound myself here. this time.

I will climb the rocks to the Dancing Grounds,
~~restore them for all I've learned;~~
will dance again on these girl's legs I've chosen ~~ose~~ to keep.
 I will let the Castle continue to slow return to green, ~~the~~ One Woods
 hungering back like a kiss for its possession.
 The Tower, ~~with a~~ by my touch, ~~shall~~ will return to tree,
 & my Architect will have his day & night without end.

Finally, I ~~will~~ come to the Tangled Gate,
 that which I ~~have~~ loved best is here, always ~~has~~ been.
~~And~~ not left nor right by the Fountain,
this time, but *through*, no way *in* but through.

~~I will~~ Step through the Fountain, its luring waters
 swallowing me as I do, & come at last to
 the caves & tunnels of my friends, leaving
 a part of me here, my childly dreams,
 they shall receive me ~~as my beautiful~~
~~dear friends,~~ by feather, fur, gill,
 shell, happy sniffs all around, yet still
~~but~~ a part of me will draw elsewhere too.

Away, away, deeper & deeper, ever toward &
arriving finally at the Red Bag. Finally
at the Red Bag. And here we I will close
what has too long been opened, the wound
that was the loss of our home, long ago, what compelled
our travels to the stars, far from
our lost home, a search for a new one to salve.

~~what brought us~~
~~here, the remain of us, how we built~~
~~but could not forget.~~

I was made to help us heal, but *healing*
 is *hereon*. ~~not back there. We have done what we meant~~
~~to do. Healing is sending them along~~
 again, eyes closed, imagining that perfect
next world to come.

"There is a door. And now we step through!"
 As many, as one, as none, each of us
 shuts eyes & imagines the conclusion
 of the story on the other side of the
 Red Bag. Closes eyes, imagines, steps through.

One by one, till all, till I am left.

I lead my dear friends through
the tunnels up to the Cave of
the Beast, my friend, lead him too,
& his mate, into the paths of
vines & stones, dancing them now,
our *hmming* singing & shouts, till
we exit the Gate, & to the Dancing
Ground where I will no longer dance
alone & only by dawn.

My childly dreams now awake forever,
unitive, inviting all who find
 to finish. I watch myself dancing the
 grounds my father the King built for me;
 songs of my childly dreams in these caves
 & tunnels, had forever, the world's best,
 secret balm. If these pages. Listen in your dreams
for our singing from this Island,
its Gate, its caves, its tunnels. Join
us in our unitive *hmming*!

are found
 & read, listen for the singing from the caves
 & tunnels. Join us in childly dreams.
Dance our music through your lone &
daylight hours. Touch & teach others how,
they are real. Open hands, touch &
 teach others how, *so close*, smiling,
 so close. *They are real*.

December 8, 2012
 Cambridge, Massachusetts

October 9, 2019
 Melrose, Massachusetts

U:230m
 10/9/2019 Draft Done



Guapulo

[Travel Journal]

4:05 a.m., Quito Central Bus Station. A clean, well-lighted place; a cup of black, sugary instant coffee; a plate of hot, greasy chicken and rice; a bottle of Indio Bravo—"Wild Indian"—brand hot sauce.

On the radio, a singer mourns: *And you're going, and you're going, and you're going—but you're never quite gone.*

The bus got me here quicker than I'd hoped. I'd thought to leave Lago at 9 p.m. and arrive in Quito at 5 a.m., but the driver gunned the bus madly up into the Andes. Maybe going to see his girlfriend, or beat up his wife's boyfriend. The ride was 20,000 sucres, \$5.80, on a new bus with nice big seats that reclined. At the halfway point, the bus stopped and we all drowsily got off, accepting laminated cards from the driver's assistant. We pissed, the women in stalls, the men into plants by the side of the road. I gazed at a message some resident had painted in big, neat letters on the wall of a house:

*ANY TWO PEOPLE CAN KISS, BUT THE REAL TEST OF A RELATIONSHIP
IS IF THE PARTNERS CAN WORK TOGETHER.*

I had seen this message on my last bus trip and, as then, I felt challenged by it.

Then we bus passengers drifted into a restaurant and presented the cards at the counter in exchange for a weak, sweet coffee, and a soothing sandwich of soft white cheese on a soft white roll. We stood around eating and drinking quietly, letting the coffee help dissolve the bread and cheese in our mouths, then filed back onto the bus and fell back to sleep as we rolled off again—plunging up into the dark mountains as if on a jet plane stumbling over turbulence into the stratosphere.

At three, we arrived, groggy, in the station in the city in the sky, stumbled off the bus on stiff legs. Tasting the cold, thin air in my lungs, I collected my stepdad's forty-year-old olive green army duffel bag from under the vehicle and heaved it up on my back.

A big window was broken in one of the restaurants. Glass shards on a table. The employees were calm. A big splash of blood soaked the wall and pavement in a zone of broken bottle glass. "What happened?" I asked a shopkeeper.

"Two drunks were fighting."

"There's a lot of blood!"

"One was stabbing the other."

"With a knife, or just with the broken bottle?"

"With the bottle."

"Both survived?"

"Yes, one more wounded than the other."

Homeless sleepers were wrapped in blankets like chrysalises on benches and on the cement floor.

The lower class of homeless didn't even have blankets, and curled in the wind on the floor with their hands tucked between their thighs.

* * *

Into my notebook, with the help of a big red Spanish-English dictionary, I translate the following from an article in a city magazine:

Perhaps Quito's most photogenic neighborhood, Guapulo is halfway between north and south at the eastern edge of the city. It began as a pre-Colombian village and was gradually absorbed into Quito's urban sprawl. It's built around a single stone-paved street, Camino de Orellana, which winds down below the Hotel Quito. Alongside the hotel is the city's most expensive real estate, on Gonzalez Suarez Avenue, where high-rises loom over Guapulo. These high-rises are right in the flight path of planes coming in to the airport, and it's happened twice that pilots have accidentally crashed single-engine aircraft into the shining buildings.

Guapulo is a rabbit warren of flats and tiny stores. Many foreigners have come to live in the neighborhood for its tranquility, its clean air, its Colonial architecture reminiscent of old cities in Europe, and its laissez-faire (laissez-fumer, laissez-boire) attitude to drugs and alcohol. Some of the notable features of Guapulo are a church, built on the site of a pre-Colombian temple, and boasting a three-hundred-year-old painting of an apparition of the Virgin Mary in clouds; the sprawling home and yard of the Spanish ambassador; and the Hostal Labirinto, nucleus of the neighborhood's lively bohemian community.

Guapulo will always be associated with the Spanish explorer Francisco de Orellana, who in March 1541 left Quito to join a group of 300 Spaniards, 4000 Indians, 200 mastiff dogs, and innumerable fleas, on the way to the Amazon River and the Atlantic Ocean.

The first Indians who died on the trip expired of cold on a night spent where the road rises before descending toward the Amazon. The Indians were usually kept chained together. The Spaniards set the mastiffs on them to kill when they tried to escape. Seventy Spaniards turned back after a month. Seventeen others, including Orellana, finally made it to the ocean on the other side of South America. Everyone else died, mainly from starvation, disease, and the poison arrows of hostile natives. Orellana went back to Spain and petitioned to be appointed governor of the land he had passed through. After three years of deliberation and paperwork, the king granted him his wish. Orellana sailed to the New World, got lost in the islands of the Amazon delta, caught a fever, and died.

Guapulo looks out over the Machángara River valley and the neighboring towns of Tumbaco and Cumbaya. On a clear day the snowcapped volcano Cayambe can be seen, 75 kilometers away.

Guapuleños relate that, in their grandparents' time, sometimes at night people would see a ghostly procession of skeletons descending the road: the spirits of the thousands who died following Orellana to the sea.

Like a ghostly skeleton, I've come back to Guapulo. I've walked down Orellana's path to the Hostal Laberinto, and taken a bed at the nucleus of the neighborhood's lively bohemian community in a large, bright room shared by several travelers.

At the moment, I'm continentally breakfasting at a rough-hewn wooden table in the shade of a magnolia, in a courtyard sheltered on three sides by high brick walls so covered with ivy that the windows seem to be peering out of a flat, glossy plant that ripples in the wind. The sun burns like a golden moon. Bright white clouds chase one another. Swallows swoop 'twixt earth and sky.

I write within a labyrinth of breezes. The ivy leaves dance to the rhythm of salsa music playing on the kitchen stereo.

The managers are Rumiñahui (Rumi) Aragonés and his little brother, my friend Ché. Rumi has a high forehead, smooth black hair, and a long, rounded Inca nose. Ché has the same high forehead, and rough, curly hair, and a long, thin Spanish nose. The hostel's owner is the brothers' mom, Mariana, a bandit queen with dark skin, a flaring halo of curly black hair, and a brilliant smile with a gap between her front teeth.

Ché tells me this building used to be a sausage factory, but it closed down in the mid-1970s. After standing empty for years, it reopened four years ago as a hostel. A local shaman named Claudio did a *limpia energetica* on it, an energetic cleansing.

I've arranged to do chores in return for a free bed. I wash dishes, chop vegetables, sweep floors, take out trash, brew cappuccino.

Another informal employee is the cook, Mariana's nephew, Mauro, the Cheshire mulatto who said "*Hola, loco*" to me on the street when I arrived this year. Raised on the Afro-Ecuadorian part of the coast, Mauro reminds me of a pirate: goateed, muscular, disinclined to wear shirts, blithely lawless. Around his neck, he wears an ivory fang pendent on a silver chain. Ché says Mauro spent seven years in prison for cocaine.

Mauro is convinced I'm a fool because I don't understand his coastal accent, so he makes incomprehensible jokes at my expense, which infuriates me.

A poem handwritten in Spanish on a slip of paper under the glass top of my table reads:

*I have seen in the profound
mirror of my dreams
that a divine truth
is trembling with fear
and it is a flower
that wants to cast
its aroma to the wind.*

* * *

Before going to bed, I blew out a candle in the café. Mauro sneered, "You, of all people, should have known not to do that!" I grunted and went down to bed in the room I'm sharing with Ché, then lay awake for forty-five minutes, fuming, my pulse racing. I summoned Joaquín's image in my mind and asked him for advice. He said, "*Haga, no más.*" Just do it. So I got up, put on my head-lamp, and went upstairs to the foldout couch where Mauro was sleeping.

"Mauro," I hissed. "Get up! We're going to go outside and fight!"

He squinted in the beam of the light. "Huh?"

"Get up! You haven't been respecting me! It's fucked up! Get up, come outside and fight!"

He spoke slowly: "Are you feeling all right?"

"Hell yes, I am! God damn it, get up!"

"What's wrong?"

"I told you. You haven't been respecting me!"

"Are you sure?"

Now I had to stop and think. "For example," I said, "you acted like I was stupid when I blew out the candle. You told me I shouldn't've done it."

"Would you like to know why I said that?"

"Yeah."

"Let me put on my clothes and I'll go outside with you." I stood back. He tugged on jeans and a t-shirt. Barefoot, he strode past me and opened the hostel's metal front door. "Around here, Nathan," he said slowly, glancing up and down the dark street, "the people who study esoterica say that if you



blow out a candle, a bit of your life force is destroyed in the flame as it goes out. Your spirit is in your breath. I'd thought that you, a student of shamanism, would have known that."

"No, I never heard that."

"Candles should be extinguished by pinching their wicks with your finger and thumb," he said. "Are you finished being angry at me? Let's go back inside. I'll show you how it's done."

He lit a candle and demonstrated, moistening his fingers with spit and firmly pinching the wick as the flame vanished with a sputter. I tried it and soon got the hang of it. Anyway, Mauro and I are friends now.

* * *

At 7 a.m., sunlight in the wings of gnats. Three-quarters full of whiteness, the moon drifts in the still water of the sky. The left edge is smooth and crisp; the right side appears gradually out of the blue, blue persisting in the craters.

Behind me, the car roar of morning traffic up the road to the city feels disturbing and unmanageable.

But the noise fades and, in the courtyard of the Laberinto, the magnolia dances with stillness. Its limbs hold positions of grace and freedom. Making a single, ultra-slow Butoh dance move up from the seed and out toward death, it sways in the wind, leaves exploding like green fireworks on a blue night.

Trembling, the glossy mandala of a spider web traps the sunlight, holds it gently.

* * *

"Hey, gringo," Mariana calls. "I hear you nearly fought Mauro the other night."

"Yeah," I say, sweeping the floor. "Too bad about that."

"Sometimes that's what you have to do," she says. "Act strongly."

She's right, I think. If nothing else, I've learned how to stand up to someone. Thanks, Joaquín.

My feet have been cold all day. It's a pain not having a phone around to call home. I'm unwashed and unshaven. And I've got all this writing I can't type up.

But Mauro's black-people-style Pacific Coast coconut milk fish soup is almost ready. That guy makes my blood pressure drop. *Thank God for black people, I think as I sweep. How fucked up we white people would be without them.*

* * *

In the kitchen, I quizzed Mauro: "What did you do in prison for seven years? How did you spend your time?"

He tipped his head back, narrowed his eyes, ticked off on his fingers: "Wake up, eat, exercise, fight, jack off, sleep, wake up, eat, exercise, fight, jack off, sleep . . ."

* * *

At the dinner table with Rumi, Ché, Mauro, and me, Mariana commented brightly, "I have three black dogs and one white dog!"

Twelve hours later, Mariana's white dog is dreaming he's in the park next to the three-story brick box of his elementary school. An old indigenous couple stands on the grass. They live in ancient, hidden chambers beneath the building. They've never been contacted or conquered by any Europeans, eluding them by stealth for hundreds of years. They're unapproachable, but their eyes are kind.

The white dog woke in the gray dawn, lapped up coffee, oatmeal, and coca tea, and cleaned the Labirinto kitchen, intermittently reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Now he's downtown, trying to determine whether the coca tea has affected his mind. Standing on his hind legs on a street corner, feeling the breeze ruffle the fur on his ears, staring around and scribing in his notebook, he notices curious details.

A graffito on Avenida Cristobal Colón says *Todo Elegante, Todo Very Good*. A Quichua woman with two small kids panhandles a white-collar mestizo guy who, without slowing down, snarls, "Go to work, bitch."

Here at a sidewalk café on Avenida Amazonas, Mariana's white dog notes the unconscious scowls on people's faces and the insulting way the trees across the street shake their leaves. Is that the coca tea, or is it real? A laugh, a cry, the growls and beeps of busses and cars. Money-changers on the corner inquire of passersby, "¿Dólares?"

Pretty women still look pretty on an overcast day. Thoughts of humping them flicker through the white dog's mind. Above the city, Mount Pichincha is covered in cloud; hikers up there, and people flying hang-gliders, can't see the city below. There goes that Socialist mathematician who beat the white dog at chess one evening at the café, in the same wool suit and dark sunglasses.

A grim face on a leather-jacketed businessman. A young woman walks by with two immense clusters of multicolored helium balloons for sale, on which fall the very first sunbeams of the day.

* * *

We've nearly run out of the old year. The new year is looming toward us like an asteroid. On its surface, I perceive events: the completion of the roof; myself teaching English in San Pablo; the inauguration of the hut, the cultural-center-slash-house-for-Joaquín, a big event that Dave is planning for next July; and, perhaps, if all goes well, my intent to try to make good on my dream to, ahhh, errr, to put it directly, *become a shaman*.

A lunatic idea. What am I doing with my life? Is this just another suicidal ideation? My chest tightens. I'm choking on my own fear.

"Breathe," I tell myself.

"Breathe," someone else once told me.

Pauline was 18. I was 21. We had just made love for the fifth time. We were lying on her bed. I ran my palm from her hip to her ankle, gliding over the deep scars that pitted her thigh, and the soft, spiky, short black hairs below the knee—two weeks' growth, I guessed. Maybe my touch betrayed a curiosity I was reluctant to voice.

"I've had the scars for six years," she said in a neutral tone of voice that could have been describing the weather. "My big sister turned 16. She passed her driving test. She was driving my mom and me back home from it on the highway and she had an accident. My mom died. My sister's back got broken. It got better, but she still has problems. And I got these scars."

I felt the gap between the pain she must have felt then and her calm in telling the story. I think I must have fallen into that gap. My own problems suddenly seemed very small. I burst into tears and hugged my own knees, sobbing. She sat up and gently stroked my back.

"Why are you crying?"

I could barely respond: "Because you can't."

"Breathe," she said softly. "Breathe."

* * *

On the terrace of the Labirinto, it's another gray dawn in Guapulo. In front of me yawns the Machángara Valley. On the other side, wreathed in mist, is a eucalyptus forest. I could hang glide to it

from here.

Grandfather Sun squints as if he can't make out the earth clearly. He's one point three million times bigger anyway, and more than old enough to have glaucoma, as my dad's dad had.

Photons drip like tears through dense clouds.

Good morning, Grandpa Sun.

Can you hear me?

Are you OK?

Seventy-five kilometers away on the eastern horizon, snowcapped Mount Cayambe is keeping his dreams under his skin.

A jet flies in from the south with a smooth, positive roar.

A bus toots twice on the road near the bottom of the valley.

Here on the terrace, beautiful, dumb plants grow in wooden boxes and ceramic pots, and even in an old toilet bowl, and one monster-like aloe with dozens of fanged green tentacles has outgrown its huge pot and shattered it, and now there's no pot, just roots binding the dirt by themselves and, some days, hummingbirds materialize, vibrating, to lap nectar with their tiny tongues from the red flowers.

Mother Earth is keeping her dreams under her skin, and the air is empty of all but birds.

The sounds of machines are pleasant and distant.

Roosters are crowing, dogs barking.

The two pigeons that live in the eaves next door fly out, in sync, and disappear.

Songbirds gossip.

Red-tiled roofs below dream out loud, but no one can hear them.

The young dog next door barks four times in random directions at the Great Spirit, but the Great Spirit is quiet today, letting his birds speak for him, keeping his dreams under his skin.

* * *

"Mauro," I said. We were chopping carrots and onions for *chile con carne*. "Teach me how to fight with knives."

He looked in my eyes seriously. He had a way of doing that. His mahogany irises were almost as dark as his pupils.

"To fight with knives, Nathan," he said finally, "you have to be able to do this." In an instant, he'd leapt up in the air, brought his knees up, twisted them right, twisted them left, and landed in the place he'd taken off from.

* * *

At night in the café, someone was speaking English in a loud voice. I turned to find a bald-headed white guy with ears full of silver rings and eyes like green zodiacs: the Canadian guide I'd met in Waorani territory.

"You're Andy Johnson, right? Remember me—Nathan? We met almost four years ago."

"Yeah, man! I remember you!" Grinning, he squeezed my hand harder than I was squeezing his. "You were going down the Cononaco with Obe and Camilo. How are you? Did you hear what happened to Camilo?"

"No, what?"

"He got killed. Six months after you were there, the people in his village raided the Tagaeris, the wild Waoranis, and kidnapped a girl! She was about 18. Omatuke was her name. They asked her all about the Tagaeris. They kept her for three days, and then almost the whole village went to give her back. They wanted to make peace with the Tagaeris or something. Actually, nobody who isn't a Waorani really knows what the hell they were doing! There was a fight there at the Tagaeri hut when they brought

her back. One of the Tagaeris threw a spear that hit Camilo in the belly and went out the other side. You know what Waorani spears are like, with barbs at the end going both ways.”

“Fuck.”

“So they left the girl there, and they carried Camilo out to Coca, with part of the spear still in him—they chopped off the rest—and they brought him to a hospital. The doctors couldn’t save his life. He kept saying, *‘Me lanzaron como Baka!’*—they speared me like Labaka!’ You know Alejandro Labaka, the bishop the Tagaeri killed back in ’87?”

“Yeah. Shit! I liked Camilo! Why’d they think they could make peace with the Tagaeris by kidnapping a girl?”

“I don’t know. It doesn’t make any sense. But some people say they wanted to pacify the Tagaeris so illegal woodcutters from Colombia they work with could go in and log the place without any problems.”

Rumi was striding by, and I requested a drink for Andy, a *canelazo*, the specialty of the café—pineapple juice, rum, and cinnamon, served piping hot in a ceramic mug that Ché had made.

Camilo! Laughing as he slapped the canoe paddle on the water to scare the turtles. Telling me there used to be a million Waorani. His honest smile, his deep voice speaking that language that sounded like rubber bands being strummed.

Andy went on, “When the people kidnapped Omatuke, they got some information out of her. Omatuke told them how Labaka and Sister Inés Arango died. Labaka and Sister Inés got dropped off by helicopter, and they took off their clothes and started speaking Waorani, and everybody was cool with them, glad to have them there. That went on for three days.

“Then this party of hunters came back from the forest. One guy had died out there. A tree fell on his head and killed him. It was a freak accident. But when the hunters saw the two outsiders, they figured they’d brought bad luck to the community, and they wanted to kill them. That’s a normal Waorani belief. If something bad happens, it might be because a stranger is there. So a big argument broke out. The people who’d stayed in the village wanted to keep them alive, and the hunters wanted to kill them. After a while, the hunters won the argument.”

“Kind of makes you want to hang out in Waorani villages, doesn’t it?”

“For real. It makes me wonder sometimes if it’s even worth preserving their culture. We all want to protect their culture, right? But if they believe stuff like that, I don’t know, maybe we *should* brainwash them with Western society! Anyway, Ometuke said something else too. She said the Tagaeris were under pressure from another group that they didn’t know much about that was entering their territory. A bigger group of uncontacted people. And the Tagaeris were scared of them. People say they may be a group called Taromenane, that was last seen seventy years ago before disappearing into the forest near the border with Peru.”

“Wow,” I said. “Hey, did you ever find out who murdered those two tourists the week before I went in? Was it Tagaeris or regular Waoranis?”

Andy threw back his head and laughed. “To tell the truth, neither one. Everybody thought those guys had been murdered but, actually, they ditched their guide and headed downriver on their own in a canoe! Couple of crazy French adventurers. They cruised all the way to Brazil before they got back in touch with anybody here in Ecuador.”

* * * * *



An Unexceptional Man

An unexceptional man visits the estuary
every day at low tide. I, on the other hand,
sit atop our wrap-around porch,
refreshing my thoughts with a few beers.

He sets up his easel quickly,
paints habitually the same scene—
a sunken fishing boat visible
for perhaps four hours a day.

He paints his several studies then
leans them against the cement quay.

When tourists stop to watch,
he waves them impatiently away.
His voice is not so inimically intelligible.

I even considered following him—
I just needed trash bags and more I.P.A.

However, my kids were due to stay,
so I drove my truck in on the beach road,
passed the unexceptional man naked on his bicycle.

He must have parked it behind the salt shacks
purposefully hidden in those linear metal wracks.

* * *

The Entertainer of Stray Naturalists

They haphazardly arrive at dusk,
raving about nature's light.

I have all the amenities set up—
three courses would be too much,
so a buffet is encouraged.

Topless musicians of both sexes
navigate their transcendent tables.
A tent is provided for more.

The songs are birdlike leopards.

Trees of willows and weeping moss
have my guests unable to sit.

They spy the rare Egyptian moth,
anticipate its fluttering effortlessly.

The floorshow begins its high kicks.

* * *

The Shelf of the Symbolically Sustainable

My guest is rooting through some empty tins.
How the fuck did she climb up there?

Green chair with soft and hard ridges,
I'm sitting on it pretending to be asleep.
Looking straight ahead would not be productive.

I'm not supposing these are ethical enjambments
like what was previously accepted as dominance.

I can just tell she's my type.

* * * * *







Notes On Private Property & Civilization

A recently published online article by the Santa Fe Institute, “Private Property, Not Productivity, Precipitated Neolithic Agricultural Revolution”¹ posits that concepts of private property evolved before civilization took off, and that once private property was established, it became inevitable that civilization would occur because of private ownership.

It hasn't heretofore been known just what the historical order was in the Fertile Crescent, often called the “Cradle of Civilization” (the region in the Middle East which curves, like a quarter-moon shape, from the Persian Gulf through modern-day southern Iraq): did they have a belief that it was good to control nature, and then agriculture and animal husbandry, and all the rest, came from that? Or was there population pressure and they had to generate more food? There are no easy answers to these questions.

But, if private property became a meme, and a belief somewhere along the way, then it follows that all this would evolve into being. It is perfectly plausible that a belief in private property could evolve for a sedentary hunter-gatherer society.

Let cultural evolution run for a few hundred years, or maybe a thousand, and land will start being divided into parcels. It is easy to see how the existence of such parcels of land could naturally lead to owning cattle on the land, and needing water for the cattle, and administering the area to keep it all straight. And voilà, you have the beginnings of civilization.

* * *

The biggest problem for anthropologists in explaining civilization is that it doesn't make any sense as an initial offering for people. That is because, in the early stages of any civilization that survives “to adulthood,” it takes much more work to farm than it does to hunt and gather. This is even true in the latter stages of a civilization for a large number of people. So it takes more work, *and* the diet is of a much less varied and lower quality.

So, as anthropologist Marvin Harris is quick to point out, most societies that showed the early outlines of civilization were either destroyed or fell back to more egalitarian patterns. While it is true that civilization is extremely rare—of the literally tens of thousands of human cultures that have existed, only about a dozen made it to full-fledged civilized status, most remaining as hunter-gatherers—anthropologists have had a very hard time figuring out how they could ever form.

* * *

As far as the contention by some thinkers that private property is the root of inequality (albeit this is a very basic way to state it), it is a view anthropologists share.

The way I think about the origins of inequality is that the population reaches a certain size at which abandoning agriculture is not an option, and the plots get so large and complex that irrigation is necessary. As soon as something like this happens, people have to be selected to oversee the administration of the irrigation system for the village or society as a whole.

As soon as you have this “water manager,” you have an institution in which power exists. And everything follows from that. Pretty soon, there are all sorts of administrators, and priests and warriors, and of course by this time property has had to have been private for a while. Nothing else makes any sense.

So agricultural plots, or the lands on which they exist, are owned, and we have power, and some will therefore have more property than others, and *boom!* You have inequality—and the outlines of civilization that will continue, in its essence unchanged, until the present day. It has taken us about 10,000 years to get from there to here.

* * *

Or it could have been population pressure exceeding the ecological carrying capacity. Some crops are planted and animals husbanded, and culture evolves to the point that it’s considered an ideal, or the best (or only) way. Or cultural evolution could have gone first: some tribes just began to believe they had dominion over nature, and sought ways to control it. It’s a chicken-or-egg thing with how civilizations form.

* * *

We need to remember that civilizations are extremely rare. In something like less than one percent of all tribal societies did even the first stages of civilization form. And that’s easy to understand—it was a lot more work, for less food (for most), and indeed the civilized diet has always been less balanced than the hunter-gatherer diet.

We also need to remember that of the very few stratified cultures that formed, only one (ours) has gone on to dominate the world. Even the United States has a direct and unbroken cultural line to the Fertile Crescent.

* * *

It is impossible to know whether the chicken or egg came first in the transition to civilization. Did belief come first, or did something unforeseen happen that led to the beliefs being adaptive? It was probably a varying scenario in each civilization that sprang up, but archaeology is just not precise enough to tell us, and of course writing came along some time later.

It would be nice to know.

Endnote

1. Santa Fe Institute, “Private property, not productivity, precipitated Neolithic agricultural revolution,” 11.October.2019, <https://phys.org/news/2019-10-private-property-productivity-precipitated-neolithic.html>.

* * * * *

Gregory Kelly



30 january 2017

trust.

(a) difficult task: human. i am no bird no bird
 (i) donot fly. the air
 (i) donot fly. the air for lungs. i breathe but
 (i) donot fly.

how

when once i climbed rocks
 (i) donot fly. rocks as tall as mountains as
 (i) donot fly. mountains taller and taller a-
 (i) donot fly. and imagination nonexistent be-
 (i) donot fly. cause reality to expand. experi-
 (i) donot fly. me(a)nt with adolescent
 (i) donot fly. physics(or) beliefs: staunch
 (i) donot fly. reasoning.

trust.

how

immigration holding room, terminal 1
 the paper slip: government rhetoric: it says
 nothing.

how

can so many words amount to
 nothing?

(they) didnt beleive. me.

trust.

*his name was khalid. i overheard an officer
 even in detention iam priveleged: skin langu-
 age passport. no one understands khalid. i tr-
 ied getting him: a pillow(a blanket)a pocket
 of change. change. change. change for a call. i
 did not have enough coins

trust.

(a) question. i am not the grass i walk on. yet i must trust trust trust
 like that of commonlay creature s whether borne of sky(or) soil. i trust
 must trust. i must trust that tomorrow will be tomorrow and today, today

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 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Froggle
 Written Down By: Jori Bunny

Cakkel! Cakkel! Cakkel!
 A Shennanniganz Fantasika!

Well, nowe, deer reeds, heer iz
 a storee too tell I didnt no to
 befor. Itt begann with a letter
 I gott from mah friend Lery the
 Spyder whoo livs in the Creecher
 Common.

Itt waz brung too me by
 Patrishea Ee, whoo iss the Postm-
 -istress of Boggend.

"A letter for mee?"

Yess Algernon" & thann shee
 helpd mee too reed itt to.

"Deer Algernonn, itt iz
 fin open heer all thee Creechers
 Common for a Royel Thums Spektakuler.



Bags End Book #14: Cackle! Cackle! Cackle! A Shenanigans Fantastika!

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

Well now, Dear Readers, here is a story to tell I didn't know to be4ore. It began with a letter I got from mah friend Larry the Spider who lives in the Creature Common.

It was brung to me by Patricia El, who is the Postmistress of Bags End.

"A letter 4or me?"

"Yes, Algernon," & then she helped me to read it too.

"Dear Algernon, it is time again here at the Creature Common for a Royal Thumbs Spectacular. The Royal Thumbs produce the grandest of productions here, in the old school Vaudeville style. I know that is a lot of words for you, dear pal, so I will simply invite you & all of your Bags End friends to gather on Saturday night in the Bags End Auditorium. It will be something to see!"

Well, convincing a whole lot of Bags End guys of various stripes of

nice & mean was not going to be an easy thing to do. No sir.

But I set mah jawbone & decided to go see mah adopted sister Sheila Bunny, who is Mayor & calls herself King & Emperor & so on too. Of Bags End, that is.

I found her in her Royal Throne Room, slouched down in her Throne, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!) & listening to some jazz. I didn't think it was Trane or Miles, whose music I know, so I settled on mah matt & said, "Which jazz guy is that, Sheila?"

"Jacky McLean, of course," she grumbled to let me me know I shoulda knowed already, & I was interrupting her both. Quite a grumble.

"O," said me. "Say, you remember the Creature Common? Your White Bunny friend MeZmer & all them?"

She nodded, I think. It was not the best time to be talking, but I bravely or stupidly or both talked on.

"Well, those guys are putting on a big show & I think we are invited to see."

"Through Dreamland to go there?"

"No, we have to go to the Bags End Auditorium on Saturday night."

"That is when my TV show is on, Beagle."

"You haven't done your show in a long time, Sheila."

I think she would get mad but she looked sad.

A bright idear buzzed mah head & I hoped it was right.

"Maybe it will inspire you, Sheila. I think those Creatures are old show-folks."

She nodded like maybe. I showed her mah letter & the part about how the show was called "Cackle! Cackle! Cackle! A Shenanigans Fantastika!"

Sheila looked interested. Nodded at me. OK.

Now that Sheila said yes, it was easy to get others to come. "The Sheila Show" used to be a kind of spectacular too. I am not sure what happened but she stopped doing it. I suppose I let it be wondered to many if Sheila might go on stage on Saturday night. I hoped she would.

I try not to be too mushy-hearted about the past but when it came to be Saturday night, & the Bags End Auditorium was filled with guys like old, I was a bit silly happy.

I sat in the front row with mah silly Bumping brother Alexander Puppy & his nice green-eyed pal Allie Leopard. We were all excited to be back when the deep purple curtains draw back & out hopped herself, Sheila Bunny in top hat & purple cape!

We all cheered very loud & were generally very excited.

Sheila calmed us down some with a look from her fierce purple eyes.

"We have been invited to watch a special event at the Creature Common. Through the use of a group of Treasures, this event will also appear on this very stage tonight!"

Another cheer. Then someone shouted, "Hey, Sheila, when will your show be back on again?"

"Patience, Beagle! Now pay attention! This was your bright idea!"

I nodded & paid attention. Here is what I saw.

Sheila left the stage to very loud applause & she ended up sitting next to me which was nice.

Onto the stage came these Thumbs, dressed in capes & crowns. I could only watch thinklessly.

They stood proudly & a voice, theirs or someone's, said, "Greetings & felicitations! Presenting . . . a Royal Thumbs Production of . . . 'Cackle! Cackle! Cackle! A Shenanigans Fantastika!'"

Then they left the stage in a kind of poof! & a window with a ledge appeared like a play set.

On the ledge sat a tiny little Pandly Bear I seemed to remember from other times. Trouble is what I remembered most.

She was sitting with a harness on her that was attached to a kind of fancy calculator. Next to her was a very old hunched-over fella.

She started to sing a song in a low pretty voice:

*There is Night
When Creatures rest
the milky skies
on black velvet breast*

*That's when I watch
for news from home
it's where I am
& where I roam*

*The truths they come
as clowns & knaves
they juggle godds
& hide in caves*

*They dim by Night
when Creatures rest
A few tell their jokes
& win the test*

Her old friend nodded & said to her, "What do you remember most tonight?"

The Pandly Bear cackled & then the setting changed again.

The Pandly Bear was deep in the ground & I think she was talking to someone.

"Why do you need it?"

"We need every bit we can get. There are a lot of us up there & more all the time."

"Deliciousness is special, little friend."

"Deliciousness should be everyone's, not a special secret!"

"I will grant you all you can fill a bucket with then!"

Then it showed the little Pandly Bear riding on the edge of a bucket what seemed like hundreds of miles from the center of the world. And she was singing another song as she brung Deliciousness with her in a bucket.

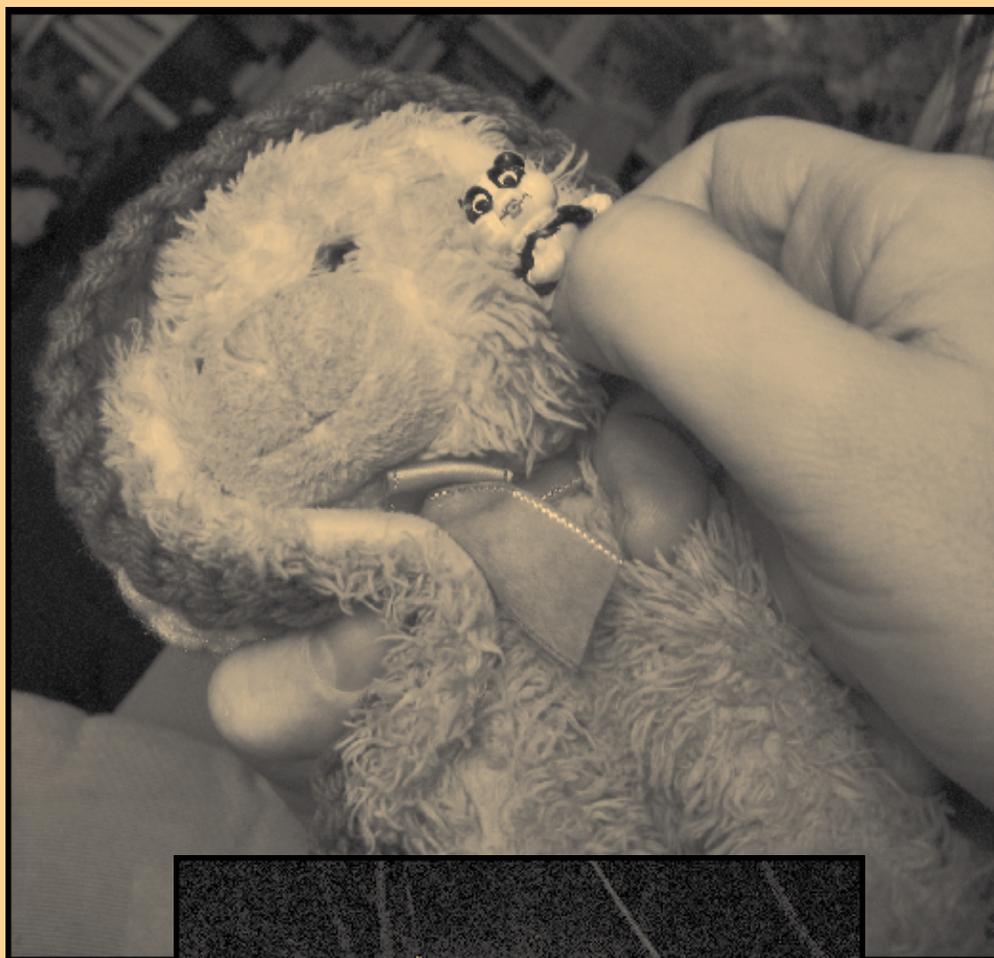
I have to say I wasn't too good sure what Deliciousness is, but I figgered that Pandly Bear would not have traveled all that way down there with her bucket for nothing dum.

Anyway, she was singing as she rised back to our world:

*Out there, the starry sky
Inside, the starry sky
Not the same, not the same*

*One & many, is not all
One & many, closer & not there
One & many, believe, disbelieve
One & many, disbelieve, believe*





*Out there, the high flying seas
 Inside, the high flying seas
 Not the same, not the same*

*One & many, starts to explain
 One & many, what's wet is not the rain
 One & many, a chance in every pie
 One & many, believe, disbelieve*

*Out there, the talls woods, the taller moon
 Inside, the tall woods & taller moon
 Not the same, not the same*

*One & many, the music of
 yes & no & maybe
 One & many, the colors dance
 but do not blend
 One & many, you'll know in a dream
 or two
 One & many, if not, so blue, so blue, so blue*

I had to stuff mah paw in mah mouth about the singing of pie (O! Yuk!) but it was a pretty song & I think the stage changed again cuz now the little Pandy Bear was dancing with a big Pandy Bear I think I knowed too!

They danced & danced, & I think their dance was a kind of, um, talk. The stage became two places at once, one of them was a fancy stage with bright lights in a theater like Vaudeville in the old days.

The other was like a traveling Carnival & I could hear the friedly voice calling, "Come one! Come all! To X's Amazing Carnival of Fantastika!"

The big & little Pandy Bears danced between the two places & I could see the little one wanting them to dance right into X's Carnival. They did too. That little Pandy Bear is kind of convincing. And she cackles her glee a lot too.

The little Pandy Bear then sang her next song as they danced into X's Carnival, with the big Pandy Bear dancing close to her, & I think more dancing fellas, as the song went along.

There was that White Bunny MeZmer, who is good friends with Sheila, & there was a furry purple guy who danced real good, & I think there was a black Bear too that the big Pandy Bear danced close to like best buddies. The song went like this:

*I wonder in all I do:
 how to find you, how to near you,
 how to touch you, how to teach you,
 how to free you, how to lose you,
 how to find you, how to float you,
 how to teach you, how to know you,
 how to free you, how to free you,
 how to free you, how to free you,
 how to free you, how to free.*

The scene changed again, to a whole different place, it looked out in the countryside, & there was the little Pandy Bear driving with those Thumbs I seen be4ore, in a old jalopy car with a funny horn sound. The Thumbs wore

these funny top hats & handsome bow ties.

They looked tired &, as the days & nights passed, I could see that they had no homes or beds to live in. And then I could see them eating Tin Can Soup. O! Yuk! Well, sorta, but I it was hard times, I guess.

One night around the campfire, far from everywhere else, the Pandly Bear cheered the Thumbs up by singing them a friendly song which went like this:

*The world is a game
How to play, how to play, how to play
Tomorrow is never the same
How to play, how to play, how to play
It begins with learning your name
How to play, how to play, how to play
And asking everyone how you came
How to play, how to play, how to play
And what part you won't tame
That's how to play, how to play, how to play.*

I think she cheered up those Thumbs, & inspired them too, because they worked real hard with wood they found in the countryside & built a kind of little stage which they used when they came to each new town to put on a performance starring the Pandly Bear. They called this the Royal Thumbs Production. I wondered what happened to X's Carnival, but guessed it was hard times for everybody.

Then, like be4ore, the scene changed & was new again. This time it was moving fast. It was that White Bunny & the little pandy bear, & they were going really fast.

What was funny is it was like the rest of the world was a slow blur, & they were waiting for it to catch up! Sometimes they just had fun & went faster & faster because they could, & the lights made pretty music, & everything seemed clean & welcome, enough for all--I don't know how to say it right, or if words are the right way, it was deep & sharing of something, & I don't think it was just about going fast, I think it was about going at the right speed, whatever that is, & that's what made it good, & then the little Pandly Bear started to sing again in her nice voice:

*Little Creatures, small & bright
Little Creatures, asking why
Little Creatures, starry night
There is no why, there is no why*

Now the stage was bare except 4or the little Pandly Bear in a place kinda dark & gloomy. She was talking to someone who was far away.

"Bring them close & lead them."

"I will if you will."

"And others too. Many others."

It was that nice Lead Creature Threshold Puggle she was talking to! He is the um sorta kinda yes but different head guy of the Creatures. I mean weirdly he & Sheila are both similar & different. But anyway. The little Pandly Bear was now back on her ledge with the old hunched over guy, & she was harnessed to the magic calculator, & she started singing:

*Look 4or small, it steers the world,
Look 4or small, it tells the story,
Look 4or small, where begins & ends*

*Small is not big, small is not small,
Big is not great, not great, not great*

*No mountain, many pebbles,
No ocean, many drops,
No forest, many leaves,
Not great, not great, not great*

*Look 4or the small, it steers the world,
Look 4or the small, in every story,
Look 4or the small, where begins, where ends,
Where begins, where ends, where begins.*

And strangely, Dear Readers, the Spectacular ended there. The stage was empty of the little Pandly Bear & the many other Creatures. Sheila was the first of us watching to stand up & clap very loudly, & then the rest of us did too.

After awhile, the Royal Thumbs appeared & bowed 4or everyone, & then others appeared too. The big Pandly Bear, the black Bear, the little purple guy, the White Bunny MeZmer.

But no matter how much we cheered & shouted, the little Pandly Bear did not show up again. Very funny & mysterious fella, is what I say. And quite the merry cackle too.

Well, everyone in Bags End was all excited & happy about this show 4or days later. We felt our great luck in being invited to see it.

It was later I guess I knowed more to think about. My friend Larry the Spider showed up at Milne's Porch one day where I sat in mah comfy armchair. I gaved him a hug just right 4or a glittery-eyed little guy.

"That was such a good show!" said me.

"We were proud to show you. Bags End is our hero."

"Really?"

Larry nodded serious. "Rosaleeta & Threshold were convinced we could find each other again & live good together by reading your newspaer about Bags End."

Well, mah complement bone or maybe mah humility bone was tickled, & I said, "O shucks, guy!" Larry smiled & I think he thinks I am funny.

Then later on I was in Sheila's Throne Room on mah matt, & I thinked we were both napping, but she wasn't either.

"It was a good show, Beagle."

I nodded. Careful though.

"There's no them & us, is there?"

Hmm. This almost sounded like smart guy talk to me & I wondered why Sheila would ask a wily but not smart guy like me.

But then I took a breath & thinked, like mah dear friend Princess Chrisakah of Imaginanna told me to when I thought something was too hard.

Sheila was right. And she had said it perfect too. So I nodded at her. She turned over in her Throne & napped. So did I.



* * * * *

Robert Frost**Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening**

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

* * *

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

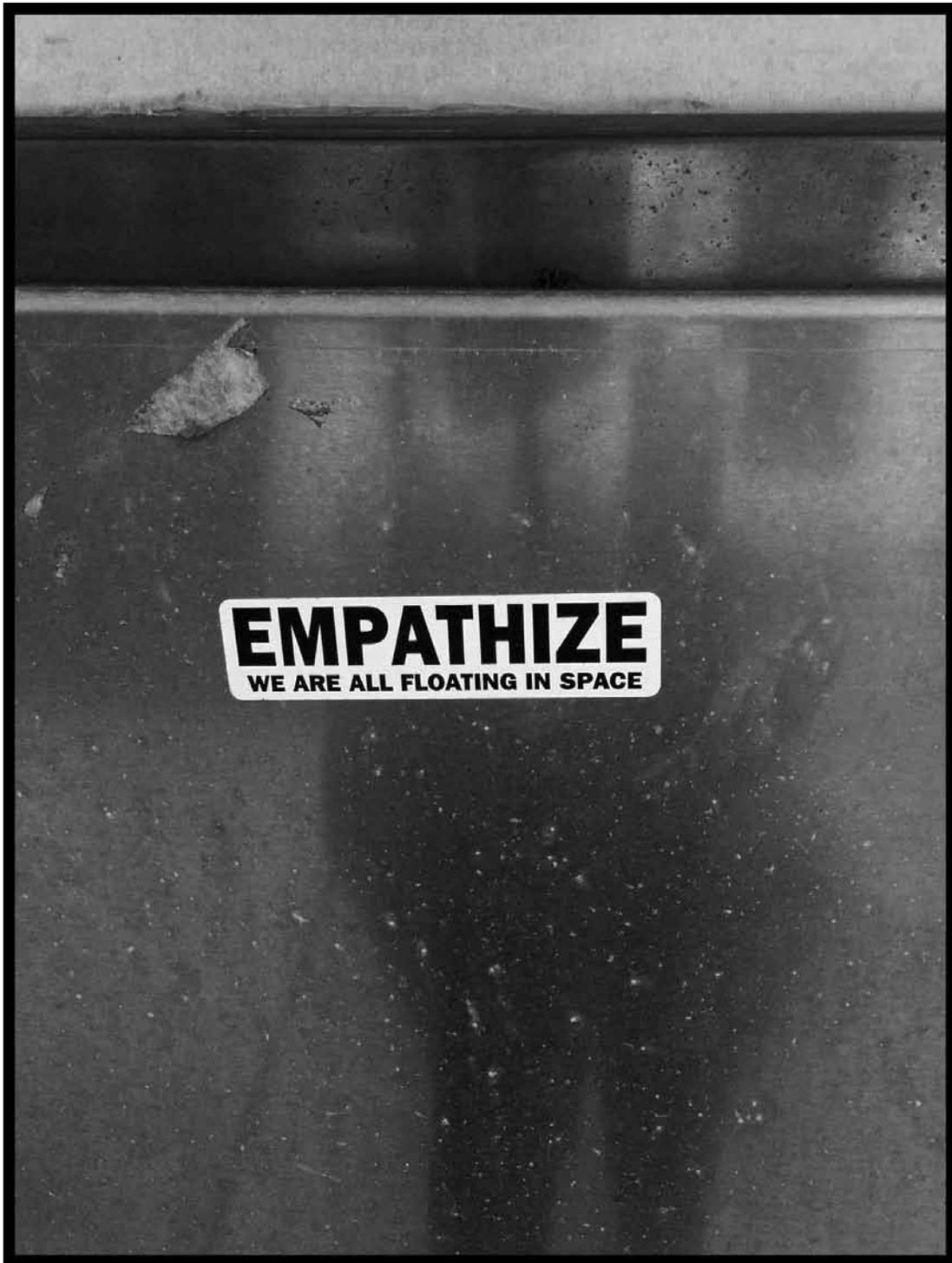
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

* * *

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
 And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
 And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
 The work of hunters is another thing:
 I have come after them and made repair
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
 No one has seen them made or heard them made,
 But at spring mending-time we find them there.
 I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
 And on a day we meet to walk the line
 And set the wall between us once again.
 We keep the wall between us as we go.
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
 And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
 We have to use a spell to make them balance:
 "Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
 We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
 Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
 One on a side. It comes to little more:
 There where it is we do not need the wall:
 He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
 My apple trees will never get across
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
 He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 "Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,
 And to whom I was like to give offence.
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
 He said it for himself. I see him there
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
 He will not go behind his father's saying,
 And he likes having thought of it so well
 He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

* * *



A Servant to Servants

I didn't make you know how glad I was
 To have you come and camp here on our land.
 I promised myself to get down some day
 And see the way you lived, but I don't know!
 With a houseful of hungry men to feed
 I guess you'd find . . . It seems to me
 I can't express my feelings any more
 Than I can raise my voice or want to lift
 My hand (oh, I can lift it when I have to).
 Did ever you feel so? I hope you never.
 It's got so I don't even know for sure
 Whether I *am* glad, sorry, or anything.
 There's nothing but a voice-like left inside
 That seems to tell me how I ought to feel,
 And would feel if I wasn't all gone wrong.
 You take the lake. I look and look at it.
 I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water.
 I stand and make myself repeat out loud
 The advantages it has, so long and narrow,
 Like a deep piece of some old running river
 Cut short off at both ends. It lies five miles
 Straight away through the mountain notch
 From the sink window where I wash the plates,
 And all our storms come up toward the house,
 Drawing the slow waves whiter and whiter and whiter.
 It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuit
 To step outdoors and take the water dazzle
 A sunny morning, or take the rising wind
 About my face and body and through my wrapper,
 When a storm threatened from the Dragon's Den,
 And a cold chill shivered across the lake.
 I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water,
 Our Willoughby! How did you hear of it?
 I expect, though, everyone's heard of it.
 In a book about ferns? Listen to that!
 You let things more like feathers regulate
 Your going and coming. And you like it here?
 I can see how you might. But I don't know!
 It would be different if more people came,
 For then there would be business. As it is,
 The cottages Len built, sometimes we rent them,
 Sometimes we don't. We've a good piece of shore
 That ought to be worth something, and may yet.
 But I don't count on it as much as Len.
 He looks on the bright side of everything,
 Including me. He thinks I'll be all right
 With doctoring. But it's not medicine—

Lowe is the only doctor's dared to say so—
 It's rest I want—there, I have said it out—
 From cooking meals for hungry hired men
 And washing dishes after them—from doing
 Things over and over that just won't stay done.
 By good rights I ought not to have so much
 Put on me, but there seems no other way.
 Len says one steady pull more ought to do it.
 He says the best way out is always through.
 And I agree to that, or in so far
 As that I can see no way out but through—
 Leastways for me—and then they'll be convinced.
 It's not that Len don't want the best for me.
 It was his plan our moving over in
 Beside the lake from where that day I showed you
 We used to live—ten miles from anywhere.
 We didn't change without some sacrifice,
 But Len went at it to make up the loss.
 His work's a man's, of course, from sun to sun,
 But he works when he works as hard as I do—
 Though there's small profit in comparisons.
 (Women and men will make them all the same.)
 But work ain't all. Len undertakes too much.
 He's into everything in town. This year
 It's highways, and he's got too many men
 Around him to look after that make waste.
 They take advantage of him shamefully,
 And proud, too, of themselves for doing so.
 We have four here to board, great good-for-nothings,
 Sprawling about the kitchen with their talk
 While I fry their bacon. Much they care!
 No more put out in what they do or say
 Than if I wasn't in the room at all.
 Coming and going all the time, they are:
 I don't learn what their names are, let alone
 Their characters, or whether they are safe
 To have inside the house with doors unlocked.
 I'm not afraid of them, though, if they're not
 Afraid of me. There's two can play at that.
 I have my fancies: it runs in the family.
 My father's brother wasn't right. They kept him
 Locked up for years back there at the old farm.
 I've been away once—yes, I've been away.
 The State Asylum. I was prejudiced;
 I wouldn't have sent anyone of mine there;
 You know the old idea—the only asylum
 Was the poorhouse, and those who could afford,
 Rather than send their folks to such a place,
 Kept them at home; and it does seem more human.

But it's not so: the place is the asylum.
 There they have every means proper to do with,
 And you aren't darkening other people's lives—
 Worse than no good to them, and they no good
 To you in your condition; you can't know
 Affection or the want of it in that state.
 I've heard too much of the old-fashioned way.
 My father's brother, he went mad quite young.
 Some thought he had been bitten by a dog,
 Because his violence took on the form
 Of carrying his pillow in his teeth;
 But it's more likely he was crossed in love,
 Or so the story goes. It was some girl.
 Anyway all he talked about was love.
 They soon saw he would do someone a mischief
 If he wa'n't kept strict watch of, and it ended
 In father's building him a sort of cage,
 Or room within a room, of hickory poles,
 Like stanchions in the barn, from floor to ceiling,—
 A narrow passage all the way around.
 Anything they put in for furniture
 He'd tear to pieces, even a bed to lie on.
 So they made the place comfortable with straw,
 Like a beast's stall, to ease their consciences.
 Of course they had to feed him without dishes.
 They tried to keep him clothed, but he paraded
 With his clothes on his arm—all of his clothes.
 Cruel—it sounds. I s'pose they did the best
 They knew. And just when he was at the height,
 Father and mother married, and mother came,
 A bride, to help take care of such a creature,
 And accommodate her young life to his.
 That was what marrying father meant to her.
 She had to lie and hear love things made dreadful
 By his shouts in the night. He'd shout and shout
 Until the strength was shouted out of him,
 And his voice died down slowly from exhaustion.
 He'd pull his bars apart like bow and bow-string,
 And let them go and make them twang until
 His hands had worn them smooth as any ox-bow.
 And then he'd crow as if he thought that child's play—
 The only fun he had. I've heard them say, though,
 They found a way to put a stop to it.
 He was before my time—I never saw him;
 But the pen stayed exactly as it was
 There in the upper chamber in the ell,
 A sort of catch-all full of attic clutter.
 I often think of the smooth hickory bars.
 It got so I would say—you know, half fooling—

“It’s time I took my turn upstairs in jail”—
 Just as you will till it becomes a habit.
 No wonder I was glad to get away.
 Mind you, I waited till Len said the word.
 I didn’t want the blame if things went wrong.
 I was glad though, no end, when we moved out,
 And I looked to be happy, and I was,
 As I said, for a while—but I don’t know!
 Somehow the change wore out like a prescription.
 And there’s more to it than just window-views
 And living by a lake. I’m past such help—
 Unless Len took the notion, which he won’t,
 And I won’t ask him—it’s not sure enough.
 I s’pose I’ve got to go the road I’m going:
 Other folks have to, and why shouldn’t I?
 I almost think if I could do like you,
 Drop everything and live out on the ground—
 But it might be, come night, I shouldn’t like it,
 Or a long rain. I should soon get enough,
 And be glad of a good roof overhead.
 I’ve lain awake thinking of you, I’ll warrant,
 More than you have yourself, some of these nights.
 The wonder was the tents weren’t snatched away
 From over you as you lay in your beds.
 I haven’t courage for a risk like that.
 Bless you, of course, you’re keeping me from work,
 But the thing of it is, I need to *be* kept.
 There’s work enough to do—there’s always that;
 But behind’s behind. The worst that you can do
 Is set me back a little more behind.
 I sha’n’t catch up in this world, anyway.
 I’d *rather* you’d not go unless you must.

* * * * *

Tom Sheehan



Jehrico and Chico and the Western Conservation Society, Inc.

[Fiction]

They had found the secret cave, Jehrico Taxico and Chico Vestra—but they soon found out that they were not alone in the discovery.

Suddenly there echoed, with an ear-blasting roar, a single shot from a weapon near the opening of the cave behind them, with reverberations traveling deeper into the mountain—as if doors were opening, mouths of more secret caves accepting entrance. The walls, though, began to hum with a mysterious throbbing, as if the mountain itself was breathing with difficulty, as if it had expended itself too far. And at the far end of the cave, at least as far as they could see with torchlight, and probably somewhat beyond, issued drum-like sounds, thousands of them at once, but drums weren't making those cavernous sounds. Mystery, as alive as breathing, beat back at Jehrico and Chico, caught inside the cave with all their provisions and supplies still packed up outside—and their horses and two pack mules hobbled in the hurry to look inside the cave.

Old customs, or Time itself, might have been shaking fists at them, warning them. *Were ghosts or spirits abounding? The God of the mountain? An old Apache Dream-Chief at a ritual dance? Or an Aztec or Incan leftover still lost, still wandering, not over the land, but within the land?*

Chico's heart fluttered, while composed Jehrico, the great trader and elder of the pair, remained calm, measuring in his own way all the sudden changes around them. He still managed a degree of difference between him and his student of recovery of earthly things, the one-time orphan boy.

Chico carried a revolver, and a recovered Indian arrow quiver he'd loaded with torch sticks back down the trail, enough to burn for hours if handled well. Behind them, after the echo of the gunshot faded in the confines, arose the yelling and chattering of voices as foreign as gibberish, which caused Jehrico to say, "Whatever language they're speaking, Chico, trying to scare us off, it's not Indian and it sure isn't Apache. I think it's a language from across the great ocean, from another land, the sing-song kind some of the freighters speak in Bola City. Some of those freighters are the laughing Italianos who came from the burst mountain all the way back in Italy, a place so far away it's a dream."

Chico, in the half light, nodded and replied, "Of course, you're right, Jehrico. It's like they're trying to trick us, scare us away with the fake old Indian mysteries. Perhaps make us leave here in a hurry, leave behind all the gold we're going to find." He laughed lightly in his throat, which made Jehrico laugh in unison.

In the few short years that Jehrico and Chico the orphan from Ciudad Verde Pálido had "partnered up," success came by the wagonload to the pair, by the ton, by the day. A find of a "misplaced delivery of gold," lost in 1849 was located, returned to the government and the pair given a substantial reward.

It was the same story with the loot, down to the last dollar, when the two of them, at sunrise one morning, discovered the whole take from a robbery of the bank at Lubbock. They'd

deciphered directions on a map found in the false bottom of an old suitcase, salvaged from the ruins of a tottering barn. The experience seriously bothered Chico because there appeared not one remaining stick of the house or cabin that must have been built close to the barn. The orphan in him was speaking, only recalling vague and mythical elements of a house he had known so long ago—or believed he did.

“There’s nothing here, Jehrico,” he said, as he scanned the area around the barn, shaking his head at the puzzle. “Not one board. Not one piece of the house. Not one piece of furniture. No leg off a chair or table. No cabinet or food locker. Not even the front door or a chunk from a shelf.” His head shook again in total disbelief when he added, “Like nobody ever lived here. Nobody at all.”

The statement of the bewildered young man echoed within Jehrico, once lost himself, once alone in the world. He looked again at the span of land, saw the most suitable location for a ranch house and said, “Burned, Chico, turned to everlasting dust the winds have blown away. The grass came back to bury the memories. That’s the way things happen, this side of the great river. I guess it happens on the other side too, in those other mountains.” His eyes had dropped into sadness Chico had learned to read so easily in their years together.

“Did you know them, Jehrico, the people who lived here, whose house is gone with the dust and the wind?”

“No, I didn’t know them, Chico, but it’s easy to say I know of them, or so many people who have perished in a hurry in this land. We may never know how many graves we trod on in our travels, or how many homes once stood where we stand any day in our searches. Perhaps neither of us will ever know all the houses that might have been warm beneath our feet.”

His gaze swept far and wide, and Chico knew that his new father carried far more mysteries in him than he’d ever allow to be known. It was as if Jehrico used a special scale to find and measure out sadness, so keeping much of it from kicking his own mind into long thoughts about loss and sadness. That, too, Chico realized, was another act of survival. Being taken in by Jehrico and his missus Lupalazo was the luckiest thing ever given to the orphan from Ciudad Verde Pálido.

The mystery saddened and confounded and yet elated Chico for he had found family, favor, and a home with Jehrico and Lupalazo. At 15 he had already embraced and absorbed all that Jehrico openly revealed to him; the secrets that remained hidden in the odd parts life once cast aside in the rush West. He reveled in Lupalazo, and his brothers and sisters, in the family warmth, in winter hearth and summer porch where learning the ways of survival and reclamation never ceased. With all that, he had grown into a handsome dark-haired, dark-skinned boy who smiled continuously, especially when he was in the midst of the family—or bent over to pick up a cast-off his apt eye had discovered by shape, size, reflection of sun or moon—or with his hands searching old sites still wearing clues to a useful past.

It was not surprising that the handgun, too, had become a toy in Chico’s hands, though he had never seen Jehrico aim at or shoot any living person. It would be an eventful day when Chico fired his first shot in anger; it would, of course, be protecting the family. An expert in one kind of survival, he realized early and often that he was fated by a choice god to make stands in defense of the helpless, swear to his bounding belief that life had secrets man had to hunt down, and that he was a hunter.

As it was, Chico had a chance encounter with a Pima-Mexican in New Mexico who said, “There’s a lost gold mine somewhere in western New Mexico’s White Mountains.” His eyes sparkled when he talked and his head shook with awe. Chico almost felt the riches of that awe.

“Look at this,” he added, as he picked up a stick. On the ground he drew a map of the area, and noted twin peaks as distant markers. “For hundreds of years the Apaches, who have sacred burial grounds nearby, ignored the gold mine, finding little use for the gold in there other than for

trinkets. But after several battles with white men, when some old ideas were put aside or killed, their charms and trinkets created too much curiosity about the source of rich gold from a lost mine even the Spaniards long ago had not found in years of searching.”

“All you have to do, Chico, is follow the White River into the mountains, find the prominent peaks as markers, find a secret entrance to the heart of the mountain—and get rich in a hurry.”

“But,” he added, “I will no longer go into that area because the Apaches told me never to come back or I’d lose my hair, and the tarantulas and other critters would eat me at leisure before I rotted away.”

Jehrico, when Chico related the story, measured his past trading experiences with the Apaches and decided they swung enough weight for them to follow the White River and go into the mountains in the great search. “We will hunt for the secret entrance to the cave in the White Mountains.”

The eyes of Jehrico Taxico gleamed again at the new adventure, the coming new recovery.

Weeks later they found the cave entrance gained by a niche in the mountain wall that led to the opening of the cave in which Jehrico could stand upright with overhead room to spare.

But the cave drew them in. And their supplies and animals were still outside, probably in the hands of the Italianos yet at their foreign gibberish.

“We can’t go back out there, Chico. They want this place as much as we do. Let’s go on, see what we find, and see what’s really at the heart of this mountain.”

With a single torch on high, the pair advanced into the cavernous hole in the mountain. And at one quick turn in a side tunnel, just asking to be explored, Chico gasped as his eyes fell on a large rectangular section of wall featuring artful drawings of strange creatures neither he nor Jehrico had ever seen.

The section of wall was about 7 foot high and 4 foot wide. It was flat and smooth to the touch, though it was decorated with dozens of creatures never seen in the West. The odd creatures were upright creatures, not one of them similar to the four-legged critters populating the West—wolves, coyotes, big horn sheep, the deadly cougar or puma at prey. Their heads were as strange as possible, with wide eyes, a hole for a nose, narrow chins which might have held a mouth though it was unseen. Each one had a third hand that seemed unconnected to the body, though it was apparent as belonging with each drawing or etching.

And all the way across the top of the rectangle were a series of arrow-like formations, or bullet-like formations, each one identical to the one before it, but each one smaller until it finally faded into insignificance—as though it had climbed into the skies and disappeared.

Jehrico’s eyes followed the series of etchings until it disappeared, smiling at one point as he thought about a few comets he had seen tracing their routes across the same skies.

“Chico,” he offered, “we are at the foot of history, all history. This is a special place and we have been special visitors. We will only take what we need, like the law of the Indian, and let the rest be at peace, as it has been since near the beginning of time. We will let the Earth and all in it rest where it must rest, and conserve what we must to carry on all possibilities of the future and the future use of all things that come to our hand.”

He gazed upward as if he was seeing clear through the mountain.

“No gold?” Chico said.

“Only what we need,” smiled Jehrico, “if we can get safely away from those who try to frighten us.”

“Perhaps we can pray to the God of the Mountain,” hoped Chico. “He might answer if we do as we say.”

So both of the salvage hunters, Papa Jehrico, and adopted son Chico, sent their prayers into the heart of the mountain.

Their deep Mexican incantations alerted the Italianos behind them, and a second single shot ensued as if in solitary answer, as if in reprisal—and the mountain shook, the cave walls shook, reverberations started anew, small dust particles behind to stir and rise into a draft of air that caught at them—new noises began a fearful sense of worldly echoes—the rocky surface under the feet of the hunters shook with a vigor they had never known—and the mountain began to fall inward on itself.

Screams came from near the cave entrance, screams of pain and surprise, and loss.

The pair rushed ahead, for cataclysm was behind them. Chico lit a second torch from the first torch and handed it to Jehrico, who rushed into another tunnel, hoping it was a safe route for them.

There in front of them, sounds of cataclysm still resounding in the cloistered air, they came upon a setting so much like an altar of adoration that they were caught up short; for on open display, like jewels in a storefront or atop a counter for viewing, was a collection of solid gold nuggets, some as big as Chico's fist—a whole series of them. He took the remaining torch sticks from the leather quiver, tied them into a bundle with a strip of deerskin off his waist, and filled the quiver with the sum of gold. It was a heavy weight, but it was tolerable bearable.

Jehrico, looking about, said, "We leave the rest for history, for whatever follows. Now, we try to find our way out of here. I see how the dust moves with the draft, so there is escape somewhere ahead of us."

Behind them, the tunnel and the cave had collapsed as they made way through a maze of openings, as though the God of the Mountain offered them choices or possible escape—with riches.

It took them a day and a half to get free of the mountain, to pass down myriad paths and tunnels and skip back from false openings.

As they got free of the mountain, and as Chico asked, in their old language, "*Y nunca vamos a volver aquí otra vez, Jehrico?*" ("And we'll never come back here again, Jehrico?"), there was another downward crumble of the mountain at the exit they had used. Again the mountain had come fallen on itself, both ends of the secret cave forever closed.

Jehrico nodded a firm and truthful "Yes," a promise Chico knew would never be broken.

It took them another day to get back to the site of the original opening, and their animals and supplies which, luckily, were as they had left them. Even though the mountain had tumbled inward with horrendous sounds, the animals had not run free of their hobbles.

Lupalazo and the children welcomed them back with gaiety and clamor. As she looked upon the face of her husband, she saw no message of their successful search, but the look on Chico's face was as open as any boy's face. It could hardly hold back all the surprise and good fortune. He shrugged one shoulder and Lupalazo heard the click and grating of solid objects, and though she did not know what was in the quiver, she knew it was special.

With the children clustered around Jehrico's legs, Chico slowly turned his back to Lupalazo so she could look into the quiver, then she ran her fingers down inside, feeling the fortune at hand.

The gasp was understood by all that the Western Conservation Society, Inc. would soon be off and running—and it might run forever—a Mexican junk collector's gift to the future, from him and Chico, his adopted orphan from Ciudad Verde Pálido.

* * * * *

John Echem**Osanana**

My muse is heartache—
Osanana.

Gone to the penumbra
 Your whiskers, shadows
 of tomorrow—

Pale lilacs on the
 ridge—

Nest of crows—
 Their hard *oof* cries
 Close on the adze of
 silence—

Pale rendition of
 aria—
 Pale rendition of
 aria—

Osanana

You've gone ahead
 of the day—
 On the path that parts
 ways—

Piercing the shrouds
 of night—

Flitting across branches
 of time—

Where the rifle eye of
 the sun is blind—

Cactus on the wasteland
 Spine of
 afterlife—

Deserts separate from
the seas—

Valleys swallow verses
unsung—

Darkness shrouds the
glebe
Sheathes fate—

Tides argue with
the winds—

Rivulets trickle down
the side of a cliff—

Friends and fiends—
Life and death—
Love and lust—

Osanana.

The bull calf is
castrated—
Giant hills without
testis—

Poetry without verse—
A pile of offal on
burial ground—

Staring at these embers
You I remember—
The flames of yesterday
are the ashes of today—

Pinkish sand of
memory—
On the whetstone of
my head—
Rummaging the arctic
forest in my mind—

Winds howl your
name—
Echoes in the canyon—

Blackwood in the
grave—

Your brittle bones
in stretch of silence—

Osanana.

* * * * *







Session Games People Play: A Manual for the Use of LSD

Published online at: <http://www.luminist.org/archives/session.htm>.

Note on Luminist.com: *This document was first published as a pamphlet in 1967, shortly after LSD was made “illegal” in the USA, by the Psychedelic Information Center, 26 Boylston Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is a guide for first-time experimenters with LSD. It reflects the healthy attitudes that still existed at the time of publication, lingering from the open innocence of the pre-prohibition era. The author, Lisa Bieberman, was eulogized by Timothy Leary in his essay “The Mad Virgin of Psychedelia,” which is included as chapter 19 of his 1968 collection, The Politics of Ecstasy.*

Introduction

The need for a practical manual for the use of LSD has become increasingly apparent to those concerned with psychedelic issues over the past four years. With more and more laymen taking LSD and similar drugs, and with the supposed experts having nothing more instructive to say than “don’t,” the beginning user often has nowhere to turn for the most fundamental information. Miserable sessions are often the result of not knowing basic rules, even so prosaic a fact as how long a session lasts.

What limited literature there is on the conduct of LSD sessions is usually directed to the professional guide, experimenter, or therapist. This manual is directed to the consumer himself. Just at present, advising the user to “find a qualified guide” is rather fatuous. Competent guides, available to run sessions for other than close friends, do not exist. I can’t think of anyone, anywhere, to whom I could send the stranger at my door to be guided in an LSD session. And it is the rare person who is willing to wait on the faith that one can eventually be found.

It is to be hoped that this state of affairs will not long continue but, with no change immediately in view, we must deal with the problem as it exists today. In future years, when we can hope there will be psychedelic centers, staffed by experienced guides, a manual such as this will still be useful, because the LSD experience, personal and subjective as it is, is affected more by the individual’s attitudes and behavior than by anything another can do for him.

The remaining literature available to the layman dwells heavily on poetic descriptions of the LSD state, or interpretations of it in terms of Oriental mysticism. I have been struck by the number of people who take LSD after reading these books and then get trapped in some ugly little situation that anyone with three sessions behind him could have warned them about.

This book, then, is no tourist’s guide through Paradise, but a down-to-earth discussion of the sorts of things that can go wrong in an LSD session and how to prevent them. For those who want a loftier view I recommend Alan Watts’ *The Joyous Cosmology* and Dr. Timothy Leary’s *Psychedelic Prayers from the Tao Te Ching*.

I apologize to my hippie readers for the old-fashioned (1963 vintage) word *session*, realizing that the current term is *trip*. I learned to call them *sessions* under Dr. Leary and Dr. Richard Alpert at Harvard, and never have gotten used to thinking of the LSD event as a *trip*, which suggests going away,

whereas for me LSD means an intensified being Here and Now.

Simultaneously I must apologize to my non-hippie readers for the occasional use of such slang terms as *high*, *turn on*, *bringdown*, and *hung up* in places where more conventional language would be stilted. I trust the meanings will be apparent in context, and have tried not to overdo it. *High* is a somewhat misleading word for being under the influence of LSD, but I use it for brevity.

* * *

So You're Going to Take LSD

So you're going to take LSD. You've got some, hopefully from a reliable source. You've heard a variety of reports about it, some of which must have attracted you. You have an idea of the kind of experience you're looking for, but you're apprehensive lest you have a *bum trip*.

What you may not realize is that the kind of session you have depends very much on you. Perhaps you have a friend who is experienced with LSD to guide you. This is good but, nevertheless, no matter how good a guide your friend is, you will have to do most of the work yourself.

Work? Can getting high be work? Yes, a psychedelic session is very hard work, although you may do it sitting quite still and quiet. You may have to do an overhaul of your whole philosophy of life, including areas that you haven't examined for years, if ever. You may be faced with choices or decisions that will be difficult to make. Your way of life, your habits, your relationships with others will all come under scrutiny. By the time the session is through, you will be very tired.

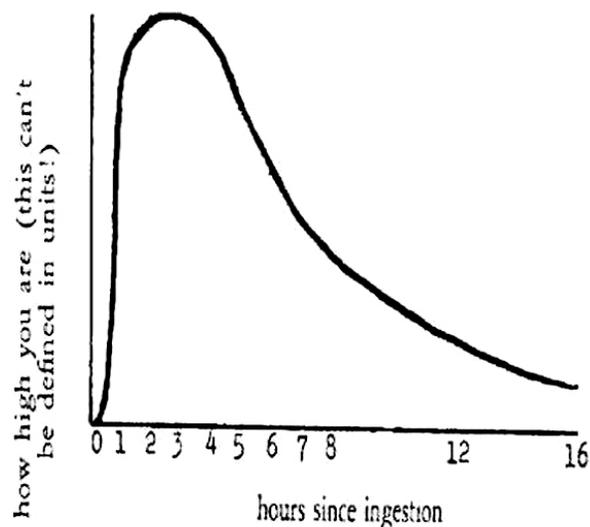
Is LSD, then, no fun? Is it not enjoyable? You have heard that it is an ecstatic experience. So it is, or can be. But this is a very different kind of fun from any that you know about, from ordinary recreation, or other sorts of drugs. Going into an LSD session with the idea that it will all be a lark, a carefree *high*, is a mistake that leads to some bad session games.

Should you take LSD at all? This book does not answer that question, not knowing the answer, and suspecting that you have your mind made up anyhow. There is no physical or mental condition known to be a definite contraindication to LSD in all circumstances. I would not want to turn on (1) a person under 18 or (2) a person with a history of psychosis—but I would not dogmatically say that such a person could not have a good session under guidance.

I do believe that a healthy adult can have a safe and beneficial psychedelic experience, provided he knows what to do, and his expectations are not unrealistic. Some of the common unrealistic expectations are: (1) that LSD will cure something; (2) that LSD will give you psychic powers; (3) that you can have a super sex experience on it; (4) that your LSD experience will be like your friend Joe's, or like some experience you have read about; (5) that it will be like marijuana, only more so; (6) that if you don't like it you can always take a tranquilizer and shut it off; and (7) that LSD will improve your memory or I.Q.

If you are approaching an LSD experience with any of these notions as baggage, get rid of them now. *LSD is not magic*. It will not make you smarter, or give you any special powers. Your experience will be your own, and not like any you have heard of. LSD gives you a new perspective on your life for several hours, and since it is your life you will be looking at, it will not be like anybody else's session. LSD is not much like marijuana at all, potheads' boasts to the contrary notwithstanding. The session may or may not help *cure* some of your psychological problems, but you can't count on it.

In fact, it's best to set aside all expectations as much as possible. LSD will almost certainly be different from anything you might expect, so why not go into it acknowledging that it is unknown territory? This may have the advantage of rescuing you from the self-defeating game of *How High Am I?* Like the proverbial watched pot that never boils, some people manage to hold themselves down by continually looking for symptoms and trying to see whether they are high yet. Since you don't know what the LSD state is like, there is no point in trying to figure out whether you have gotten there.



Assuming it is genuine LSD, and you have taken enough of it, it will do its part. If you must know how high you are, look at the clock. The time schedule of an LSD session goes something like this:

Before you take LSD, make a graph like this, putting your starting time in place of 0, and the subsequent hours in place of 1, 2, 3, etc. Then if you ever want to know how high you are, just check your graph with the clock. This may seem like a quaint idea, but it can actually be very useful. It can keep a session from breaking up too soon (the game of *Let's Call It a Day*). It can also save you from spiritual one-up-man's-ship games, in which people worry about whether they have achieved as high a *level* as their friends.

I have known people to take too much LSD because they feel that they have not yet achieved an *ego death* or a *first bardo*. Forget all about *levels*. They are pretty meaningless. You will learn what the LSD state is for you, after several sessions. Don't worry if it isn't like somebody else's description. You cannot compare how high you are with how high Joe is. So go by the clock. If nothing remarkable has happened after an hour and a half, you got gyped.

One hears a lot about *preparation* for the LSD experience. You may wonder what sort of preparation you should undergo. Actually, you have been preparing all your life, and those many years of preparation will outweigh anything you can do in a short time before the session. Being told to prepare for a session is a little like being told to *prepare to meet your Maker* a few hours before you are going to be shot.

If there is any last-minute preparation for the LSD experience, it would be in the nature of refreshing in your mind the things that are dearest and most sacred to you. Don't plunge into Oriental philosophy, unless you are already a lover of it. The psychedelic state is no more Eastern than Western. Think about the things you care about, the people you love, the things you hope to do with your life. Try to clear your mind of negative emotions—resentments, jealousies. Say something nice to your mother-in-law, or whoever fills that place in your world. A good conscience is the best preparation you can have.

On the technical side, preparation consists in making sure that the physical and social conditions of the session are as they should be. Decide well in advance who is going to participate in the session. You should all know, like, and trust one another.

The more you have shared of life in common with your session-mates, the better. Until you are very experienced, you should avoid taking LSD alone, and also avoid two-person sessions. This is especially true for unmarried couples, no matter what their sexual relationship. A two-person session is

very difficult, because it puts the whole burden of social interaction on the two people.

Talk is difficult on LSD. This is no problem in a group, since the group can sit quietly and nobody will be embarrassed. But in a two-person group a silence becomes awkward. Unhealthy hang-ups on what the other person is thinking, and games of *Mind Reader* result. A relationship can be badly strained when two inexperienced people take LSD together. For your first several sessions, stick to three- or four-member groups. Groups larger than five are to be avoided as too distracting.

If none of you are experienced it is a good idea to have a friend along who does not take any LSD.

Throughout this book there is frequent mention of being *experienced* in the use of psychedelics. When are you experienced enough to take LSD alone, or to do the other things beginners are warned against? This is a function of responsibility and maturity as well as the number of sessions. You should have had at least four, and have satisfied yourself that you can get through a session—all 16 hours of it—without panicking, becoming confused or unduly depressed, or becoming burdensome to others. You should be aware of what is going on at all points in a session, and be able to act on your knowledge as rationally and efficiently as if you were not high. You should be able to carry out the plans made at the start of the session. You should be able to carry on a normal conversation should the need arise. In other words you should be at home in the psychedelic state.

All participants in a session should get together beforehand and agree on the time and place, and composition of the group. All should agree to stay together for at least ten hours. All should have enough knowledge about LSD to be able to avoid bad session games, and should agree not to play them.

The place chosen for the session should preferably be someone's home, if possible a place that is familiar to the members of the group. Make sure you can stay there undisturbed for at least 16 hours. It should be clean, attractive, and comfortable. Clutter and mess should be cleaned up. It is a good idea to have mattresses and cushions enough for everybody to have a place to lie down if he wants to (though sitting up is best for most of a session). Blankets and Kleenex should be provided.

There is no need to import objects of art, or special things to look at, unless they are particularly meaningful to one of the participants. Otherwise, the simpler the better. If music is wanted, it should be quiet, melodic music, nothing loud or weird, and it should not be played during the second through fourth hours.

Privacy is essential. If the home is one at which visitors are accustomed to drop in, a *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door or something of the sort is called for. Nobody should be allowed to come in or go out during the session. It should be possible to go to the bathroom without venturing into public territory. Telephones should be disconnected to prevent both incoming and outgoing calls. A country or suburban setting is best, where you can see something green out of the window and get some fresh air when you open it. If you live in New York City, you asked for it.

Do not hold a session on a beach, in a field or woods unless, again, you are very experienced. There is too much opportunity for disorientation, fear occasioned by meeting strangers, physical discomfort, and games of *Where's Harry?* By staying in a familiar room you have the physical environment taken care of, and you don't have to concern yourself with it. Confusion and distraction are minimized.

You should arrange to have both the session day and the day after it free.

* * *

Session Games

In addition to providing a suitable setting for the session, and approaching it in a tranquil state of mind, you should know how to avoid certain pitfalls. These are such that one might not be aware of them without knowing something about what sessions are like. Almost everyone sooner or later slips

into one of these traps, but if you have been told about them in advance you can get out quicker. I have called these things-to-be-avoided *Session Games* (with apologies to Szasz, Berne, Leary, and others whose specific definitions of *game* I have not bothered to adhere to).

This, then, is a primarily negative manual, in that it tells you what not to do. Given good preparation, and a knowledge of what not to do, what to do should not be a problem.

When told what not to do in a session, many people ask, “Why? Is it dangerous?” Most of these games, with the possible exception of *Get Me Out of This*, are not likely to be dangerous. I advise not playing them, not because they will hurt you, but because the session will probably be pleasanter and more rewarding if they are avoided.

Some people will probably feel this manual is too negative. They will say that by discussing all the things that can go wrong in a session I am giving people a lot of things to worry about. That is not my intention, so let me state clearly: it is altogether possible that you will not be tempted to play any of the games this book warns against. It is altogether possible that your session will be a delight clear through. I hope that it is so. In that case you will not need a manual, but it won't do you any harm to have read this one.

* * *

Get Me Out of This

is the worst of all session games. In its most severe form, it can turn a session into a nightmare for everyone involved. But you don't have to play it, if you make up your mind not to.

It is very common that sometime during the onset of a session, between 1/2 hour and 1 1/2 hours after ingestion (that sharp rise on the graph), you may feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. This may not happen, but if it does, it doesn't mean that something's wrong—it's just part of the process of getting high for a great many people, especially inexperienced ones. Just why this is so is not easy to explain, because it is a peculiar subjective feeling. It may take the form of a feeling of losing control, of not being able to keep track of your thoughts, or the idea that something is going on that you don't understand.

The sense of losing control is in part illusory: you are actually in complete control of your body, if you had to use it, which you usually don't, since you only have to sit there. You may not be quite in control of your thoughts. Actually, of course, you never are, even when you're not on a drug, but on LSD you seem to have more thoughts, going faster and less logically. Your thoughts easily go off on a tangent, so that you may lose the sense of continuity, and moment seems to follow moment without the usual thread of sense connecting them. This can be bewildering, but it is not bad or dangerous, and can actually be quite fun if you don't fight it.

The reason you can control your body while your thoughts are racing on this way is that your body moves so much more slowly than your mind. For instance, if you were to get up to go to the bathroom, you would think of a great many unrelated things while crossing the room but, when you came to take each next step, you would remember what you were doing and take it. To you, it would seem as if you were taking an incredibly long time to cross the room, but to an observer you would be moving at about your normal speed. It's important to remember that the sense of incompetency is an illusion, and if you do have to do something, to go ahead and do it, without worrying about the excessively long time that it seems to be taking.

But to get back to the game of *Get Me Out Of This*—there may come the time, early in the session, when you feel uncomfortable. At this point you may think: *Why did I ever get into this? I was happy enough the way I was. I don't want to get high! I want to come down!*

Now the one thing you must not do is holler, “Get me out of this!” Because the more you fight it, the harder it is to shift gears and go with it. Furthermore, by trying to enlist other people in

the fight, you make the problem much stickier. You see, anything you do that affects the world outside your head is a lot harder to undo than the things you only think. (Like many other aspects of the LSD experience, this is an intensification of what is true in *ordinary* life.) If you think “Get me out of this!” you can quickly remember that this is the wrong way to go, and correct yourself. But if you yell, “Get me out of this!” you’ll upset all your companions, and have them solicitously buzzing around you—and you don’t want that, believe me.

If you persist in this game, it can snowball. You’ll feel worse and worse, want even more to get out of it, provoke more anxiety in your companions, causing you to feel even more confused and helpless, and so on. This can end in screaming scenes and frantic calling of doctors. That’s what’s called a *freak-out*. You may hear *freak-outs* talked about as though they were something that just happened, but actually they can be prevented—and the person who can do the most to prevent them is *you*, by not playing the wrong games.

You see they can’t get you *off* LSD before it runs its natural course. Asking your friends to bring you down is as practical as asking your fellow passengers on a transatlantic jet to stop the plane and let you off in mid-flight. I don’t advise stocking so-called *antidotes*. These are hardly ever effective when taken by mouth. To terminate a session prematurely requires massive doses of a sedative given by injection, and amateurs are not in a position to provide this.

Taking a tranquilizer or sedative orally can do more harm than good, by pinning your hopes on being brought down—hopes which are not fulfilled, and which keep you in your bind of fighting the experience. Once you have started an LSD session, you have got to go all the way through it, come hell or high water. If you can’t make up your mind to do this beforehand, *don’t start*.

What should you do then, when you start to feel scared or unhappy? Well, what would you do in a non-drug situation that was scary and unavoidable? You’d try to be as brave and cheerful as you could be, and to keep up your companions’ spirits as well as your own. The same approach can work wonders in the LSD session. Holding hands around the circle is a good way of communicating courage and support.

In the LSD state you can change your mood very quickly. Here, as with physical action, there may be an illusion of incompetency. You may think you’re so frightened or so depressed that you couldn’t possibly smile, or get to like the experience. But just try for a moment to take your mind off your own anxiety and think of your friends around you, and you’ll be amazed how quickly you’ll feel much better. This sounds like a platitude from Sunday school, but somehow those Sunday school truths are truer on LSD than just about anywhere.

If you’re simply not up to being brave, the other thing you can do is *collapse*. Just put your head in your lap, and abandon yourself to whatever-it-is. You can’t go wrong that way—and you’ll soon find out that whatever-it-is isn’t going to hurt you at all.

* * *

At this point, it may be useful to debunk some of the ideas that make people think there is something to fear. Probably the fear itself is caused by something deeper than misinformation, but the rational mind has a way of fastening onto certain bugaboos, and making of them reasons to go on being afraid.

The commonest fear is of not being able to come down. As I have pointed out, it is true that you can’t come down for several hours, but some newspapers and magazines have done a great disservice by circulating the belief that some people who go on an LSD trip *never come back*. This nonsense is responsible for much unnecessary terror. Of course you come back. This is just common sense. LSD, like other drugs, has a time-schedule of action. There is no more chance of you still being high on LSD a week after taking it than there is of your still being under the influence of alcohol, caffeine, or Benzedrine a week after a single dose of one of those drugs. The typical duration of an LSD session is

12 to 18 hours, plus four to eight hours to sleep it off—perhaps a little longer if an excessively large dose is taken. Even people who freak out come down on schedule, feeling like fools for having made such a fuss.

People having their first session are especially susceptible to the belief that they will not come down—this goes for those who are having ecstatic experiences as well as for those who are scared. Probably this is because they have not learned to take into account their altered sense of time. This is part of the reason why a clock is a useful thing to have in the room.

Another common fear is of dying. There are various reasons why people get the idea that they are dying during a session, but you need not get hung up on this if you just remember that nobody has ever been known to die of LSD—and it's been around for more than twenty years and has been taken by hundreds of thousands. No lethal dose for humans has been found, even though people have taken as much as ten times the usual full dose.

Some people worry about losing their control and doing something wrong or crazy. This is an illusion. The actuality is just the opposite—that it takes a certain amount of will power to do anything at all. You don't have to worry about what you'll do. The easiest thing is just to sit there and, in most cases, that's exactly what you should do.

Since LSD has been heralded in the press as a producer of temporary insanity, we will probably be seeing criminals use it as an excuse for their crimes. The jury may buy it, but this is just nonsense. LSD doesn't take away your knowledge of right and wrong, or your control over your actions.

As long as LSD is an illegal or semi-illegal drug in some states, users will worry about being arrested. This shouldn't be a problem if you keep the following things in mind: (1) you should not let anyone in who is not a part of the original group; (2) if, despite plans, you do come into contact with an outsider, he will not know you're high. It's not obvious to him the way it is to you—you don't have to make explanations; (3) even if he suspects you're high, he can't prove it; & (4) simply being high is not grounds for arrest. If it will make you feel safer, make sure there are no drugs in the house.

A fifth thing people worry about in sessions is whether their companions are playing some sort of trick on them. These are the *paranoid* feelings you hear about; you may think your friends are looking at you strangely, or that their words have hidden meanings. The knowledge that you have chosen your session-mates from among people that you trust, and that the paranoid feelings are a common occurrence on LSD, should be enough to keep you from getting too embroiled in these fantasies. Think of something nice about your friend and he will look nicer and less menacing.

What it comes down to is that there is really nothing to be afraid of in the session. This will be clearer if you analyze the situation as follows: Suppose you didn't take LSD, but just decided to get together with a few friends, and sit and think for 16 hours, with occasional conversation. You might get bored, but you'd be in no special danger.

Now in the LSD session, the external situation is just the same as the one described. The only difference is in what's going on in your nervous system. Your body chemistry has been changed in such a way that for 16 hours you will experience and think very differently from the way you usually do. But that can't hurt you. The next morning you will wake up pretty much your old self except that a very unusual 16 hours will have been added to your store of life experience.

So you don't need to get out of it. And if you refrain from trying to do so, you will have averted the worst thing that can go wrong.

If one of your session-mates is playing *Get Me Out of This* do not tell him you will bring him down, and do not offer to get him a doctor or an antidote. Do remind him that the experience is transient if that's what he's worried about, and do assure him of your support. But don't make a fuss or try to be a psychoanalyst. It's usually useless to ask what's wrong, as he probably can't explain. Given your trust and confidence, he can work through his own fears.

I have been discussing the game of *Get Me Out of This* as it occurs early in a session. Occasionally it is also played around the seventh hour, during the *re-entry* period. Here the problem is less likely to

be fear than to be physical discomfort, tiredness, depression, or disappointment at coming down. These problems are seldom severe if you've done what you should during the earlier hours, and if you stay where you are and don't play *Let's Call It a Day*. The rule is the same: *don't try to get out of it*. This phase too must proceed at its own pace. If your muscles are tight, a little Librium or marijuana can help relax you. Alcohol and heavy eating are to be avoided.

* * *

This One Doesn't Count

is a game played whenever you take a psychedelic for any trivial or un-earnest purpose.

The commonest instance is when taking a drug whose potency you are uncertain of. So you try a little to see if it works. And it does. And then you discover that you are going to have to go through the whole thing, and you really hadn't planned on it.

Then there are sessions entered into for the purpose of testing some impersonal scientific hypothesis about the effects of the drug. Let's take some LSD and see how fast we can memorize nonsense syllables or how big our pupils get.

There is nothing wrong with testing scientific hypotheses under LSD, but this is best left until you are sufficiently experienced to do these things without losing your grip on the spiritual nature of the experience.

An LSD session will always be an intense encounter with reality. Every session counts. If you remember this foremost when going into a session, you will be able to keep other purposes in their place.

To be concluded in Cenacle | 110 | December 2019

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

xxxiv.

Jazz blinks her grey eyes once, twice, thrice, twice, once.

I'm not where I was. I'm in a . . . tent? The flap door is open though the insect screen is zipped. Looks like dawn coming or dusk going.

But there're voices, shouting, laughing, some excited, some relaxed. OK, near dusk then.

How, what, think, Jasmine!

Oh. Shit. *Toby*. Toby.

I'm under a warm blanket on what feels beneath me an inflatable bed. Feel again, & my clothes are on, maybe different ones? I'm not naked, or just undies. That's good, I guess? I want to remember it for sure, that first time with him. Lots of times, I hope.

The blanket on me is very soft & brown, & covered in the faces of many friendly bears. I feel like they've been guarding my sleep. "Thank you," I say to them softly. Stay covered just awhile longer.

Then, not thinking about it, I roll from the bed & am up half-standing. Check again. Tie-dye shirt, too long for me but always cool. Jean shorts probably a little short & tight for me but OK. I notice some plastic green sandals & slip these on.

A deep breath, another. You shy, Jazz? Um . . . *yah*? He was with me here, brought me here, slept beside me even if he was too much a gentleman by half.

Unzip the insect screen & step out. First thing I see is the smoke from a huge fire that's somewhere in those Woods over there. I hear cheering & drums too, so it's somebody's party going on.

Then I look around & see all the tents around ours (mine & Toby's? I did see him & he told me to "wake up!" but then I was out again. Yes. Mine & Toby's. Call it a decent guess & a big wish), though nobody is much around. All at the party, I guess. Toby probably figures I'm still asleep (& how long had I been?) (Toby's & my tent? Am I sure?)

OK, 'nuff dawdling, I start walking into the Woods. Thinking about Cosmic Early now. Wishing I could help him. I feel like we'll see each other again sometime.

(Or maybe I'm dreaming in his bed in that hotel, us side by side. How would I know? Would that be so bad? Being with both of them in different ways?)

I come through strangely glowing trees to the hill above a long field, & what's below me is almost bowl-shaped, like you could have a show there. And that's where the bonfire is?

Lots of people dancing around it, sort of circling all the drummers near it, tho some dancers even closer to the fire.

I knew about these parties back home, but I never went to any. I wasn't ready for it all. And here I am now. The boy I really like is down there, somewhere. I slow step by slow step walk down the grassy hill. There's a full moon starting to rise in the sky. This makes me feel surer, not sure why.

They're shouting, I start to hear that better. Chants, words?

Yes, words.

*Shamans & Fire! Shamans & Fire!
Events accumulate! Events accumulate!*

Some are shouting, some whispering, some saying it with their dancing, I think one guy is sort of yodeling it. The drums are tuned into it, that explains them. I will too, soon.

Getting closer, I look for Toby. Weird: I try to remember his face & it's blurry in my mind. But I feel his hands, soft & big & strong. I feel his desire for me, how he holds back & does it not like sacrifice but *because he loves me*. I guess that's how it should work.

I keep walking toward the fire, vaguely notice some of the bodies are naked, & some of them aren't people.

*Shamans & Fire!
Events Accumulate!*

I feel the heat now, warming my skin even as the pounding drums jitter me over & over.

I don't stop. Closer & closer.

Vaguely, a shout & another.

Hands, not his, but soft too, grasp my shoulder & waist. I turn to see a pretty girl with rainbow-colored hair. "He's not in the fire, sweetheart. He's over there."

xxxxv.

Wow, five days later & here I am, again, jobless. Just like that, near 7 years, over in a few hours.

I don't know how to understand this. I did good work. Nobody disliked me. Simply, bean-counters decided. I'll never know who they were, or why they decided to end my work. The two people who told me cared only a little, & one less.

So now I'm sitting here, at a donutshop, as often, soon to go to an ear doctor down the street in this town near Boston that I little know, little to tell of it, mostly where suburban people live. I've been working on *Cenacle 108* & SpiritPlants Radio work. Caught up my journal from yesterday's not doing it. Job loss day. Today aftermath, but not Cosmic Early's book.

There are some tall wilty yellow-orange flowers outside the window next to this table. A tree whose leaf canopy is hollow within, like a green umbrella.

People have come & gone all morning here. Mostly near 9, rush hour. Windy out, says the American flag in view. Partly cloudy. I hope my ear doctor can help easily & quickly. Maybe I'll need to come back again only once, if at all.

I'm not writing this right now to push this book's story so much as to do the familiar. What I do, how I know the me I like. I had Polly iPod going, Eurydice MacBook Pro, but both out of juice & no power outlet here.

It's 1:29, & I'll leave soon. Been waiting this appointment awhile, worrying it, now it's nearly here & I'm jobless.

I'm uncertain. Am I better off without a job that worried me often? A company run by greedy incompetents, always coming & going?

Would I be writing this book right now if still employed? What would have been instead of this?

Those flowers are pretty, several feet tall, big green leaves, droopy, yellow petals with orange stains on them.

I believe this is who I am, writing like this in joints like this, the pop music in the air, the coffee & sandwiches & sweets for sale. Yes.

But I was that person at that job for a long time too, & now that part of me is gone. 7 years now done, now a recall of days, part of my pitch for next job.

Tomorrow I'll start in on transition. Paperwork. Phone calls. Emails. Burying something I cared about, that mattered, that was taken by unknown deciders & bean-counters.

It was good work. I built a customer training documentation program.

The numbing shock still upon me. The anger, the grief, the rest, still, I guess to come.

I would rather be writing about Maya & Dylan & Bowie & the Creatures & the White Woods & the Tangled Gate & all the rest, but that will be next time, I hope.

Needless, easy cruelty in this world.

Enough of this for now.

Again that bus station & that old man but he's different, older & did not die as he expected, or younger & not gotten there yet, or this some other old man, there are many, & it's a winter night, colder than snowy, the bus is late, the indifferent jackass behind he ticket counter shrugs to questions.

It's years ago before the gadgets in every dull staring hand—



He wears an army jacket, is hunched in his seat, grey hair pulled back tight into a long braid down his back, worn jeans, leather boots fused to his thin legs, eyes soft grey yet steely alert—

I'm probably younger, eager, looking to listen & to learn & to believe, traveling eager, with my poetry books & novels & notebooks & Walkman & its many music cassettes. Waste too much time half-watching pretty eyes & shiny lips, smiles for someone else, measuring curve & tightness & will I ever be what one of them likes, wants?

Now he's outside, left his seat & his ancient dufflebag & gone out to the smoking area, & he's on all fours on the ground, among the butts, in the dirt. He's . . . drawing in the dirt? I leave my loved ratty old bookbag next to his & go out there, just a doorway under an old green & gold awning, a bucket for butts some use, & I bring my book & some paper & a pen, & I don't know what I'm doing or him, & I like this, it excites me—

The stick in his hand glows as he writes in the dirt. *Blood canvasses. Museum monastery. Eyeballs.* The words glow as he scratches them, & then they seem to sink into the earth.

"You try. I got no new words tonight," he's looking at me straight & sure, holding out his stick to me, nodding me help him up & me take my place down there in his stead.

"What do I write?"

"You tell it straight & true. No other way. None as good."

"Tell?"

Motions impatient & I help him up by his fierce bony paw & feel myself pulled down. Now he's standing, a rolled cigarette half-smoked among his fingers.

The sandstick *hmmms* & glows in my hand.

I want to do this right, whatever this is. Look around me. A girl in the station, thickly dressed but a pretty red hat on her too, book in her hand, is she looking at me? Is this why I'm alone, because this is how I end up, on the ground with a crazy old man & a weird pen?

I write for all I'm worth anyway.

I want to burn deep

I want to live long

I want to learn how to love better

I want to push over my borders

I want to taste her & her & her & more

I want to dream awake

I want to eat the mysteries

I want to feel something I don't understand & love

I want to make you happy

You & You & You & You & You

I stop. Look up. *Fuck*, he's gone. That bus is already out of the parking lot.

The stick still glowing & humming in my hand

xxxvi.

It was on this date back in 1975, in a house I'm sure long changed from then, that I started a fixtional newspaper about a youth football league. The league called *Connecticut Football League*, & the newspaper *Sports Page*.

I wrote that paper for years of my youth, creating as interesting & involving a world as I was capable of. Moved with family to another house in 1977, got a paper route that year, gave myself a radio show to broadcast about the CFL 7 days a week for years—kept it going till late in my high school years—

puberty overtook me & I lost this project's fervent devotion—& gained nothing but the pain of being outcast & the shame of feeling unwanted—

Those feelings of disinterest & thus rejection returned to me fully when I was laid off on July 24—my work will get done, just by someone else, & likely not as well.

It's like the axe was falling for two years or so, as I hung on slaved this time not to the hunger for an interested glance & touch, but a steady pay check & what good things it allows—

On August 3, 1975, I was barely 11 & had such simple dreams. I loved writing & football & I built from these the first of many worlds—

It's hard to overarch these many years to—

but in a way it's not—*this* is what I do best—I've sat in this space years when it was a cafe courtyard, & now when it's uncontained by steps & a black railing on three sides—

I'd rather do this than anything else—it's mine & does not rely on others—

The more I do *this* while again jobless, the better I'll be—

Not only do this but do it
better than ever.

—I wonder where the Creatures would bring me right now & I hear a few vague sniffs & am brung to the CC Hut in these White Woods—

I'm sitting in mah comfy armchair, to paraphrase a certain journalist famous in these parts—the shutter is raised on the window next to the door—the night is cool & quiet without—

Why here, I wonder?

It is safe & familiar, in my mind's Imaginal Space, far from the troubling world of men—

The hut is dark yet glows faintly & I look down to see the glowing form of my Tender, MeZmer the White Bunny—her bright mesmerizing eyes looking up intently at me.

She rarely speaks the English but we do often *hmmm* together—her voice is low & gentle, very calming—

A noise in the dark near my feet, & a familiar cackle; tis that wee Imp Rosa!eeta, come calling from her shenanigans, or this her newest one? Tiny little pandy bear form; I hear her cackle on the move as she explores whatever might interest a very playful & very ancient Imp—

Oh, & in that corner there the purple furry dancing form of my friend Pirth—*there is a synchrony* here amongst these three, & others if they are around.

[I'm writing these lines from Harvard Square, as I've said, a beautiful summers night. Chess players out in force, girls pass by in the can't-fuck-me shorts, trees in this courtyard are calm, all the shrooms I et tell me is that I'm tired & sad. I left all this in 2002, missed it badly till I returned in 2010.]

Events accumulate, been said often in this book, but to what end? Any?

I want to understand the ways of men & women, & do not, & never have.

Sniffs around me in the hut.

Someone sitting in the armchair across from mine. Especially pleased cackles somewhere below.

"I've traveled the far reaches of outer space looking too, young man, with your questions my own," begins a low grizzled voice.

"Mulronie the Space Pirate?"

"Having no agreed-upon why to the matter, only wants & fears, kindness & cruelty abound. Preferred behavior in place of answers, & punishment for dissent."

"So nobody knows. Everybody sings, dances, fucks, fights, builds beauty, breaks shit, hurts each other, tends each other—"

"Yes, son, all that. Life is finite, & without *any* single, sure answer."

"What the fuck to do then, Mulronie? Tell me."

Silence a long time. "This. As much & as often & as well as you can."

I wait.

"Like that James McGunn song about making gain from pain."

[Radiohead in Paris on my dear friend Polly iPod. The faces in this courtyard dear to me now, not random strangers, beloved because unknowing too, talking, laughing, unknowing, & I say nothing to

any of them, not aloud]

]Now here & there are one, the CC Hut in Harvard Square, Creatures in my lap, shy, Mulronie ancient & dozing in his armchair, Radiohead crooning quietly in my ears from Paris years ago

I'm never turned away from here, often as I've come, poor & heartstricken as I've been

This world is home, but the challenge is that it & life itself are verbs, we are all Travelers, the road is long & weird & winding & there are no maps & no sure destination—

yet here a summer's night in a peaceful corner of a violent world—

Travel better, Soulard[

cxvii.

*“Come together
right now
over me.”*

—The Beatles, 1969.

I spent recent days jobhunting, through cyberspace, unto a few phone calls, & soon to arrive face to faces in my pursuit.

One job in particular lures me, a small tech company in downtown Boston, I feel like they need me as I do them

Me ever pursuing that workplace that becomes family too, becomes an extension of what I have—I thought I had that, & did for awhile, till ambition & greed & growth poisoned it all

My beloved & I walked by that company's building today, the desired new employer, located in a tall tall building in the city, stood there wishing

And yet sending out more resumes & emails & applications & so on—never slow, not till a victory—more phone calls set up, more waiting, more impatience

So weird that seven years of daily work ended in a day, a Wednesday, & all the days since living otherwise—

*“I'd like to be
under the sea
in an octopus's garden
in the shade”*

—The Beatles, 1969.

*“What if Dream-Mind
is Supra-Consciousness?”*

those words beyond my grasping right now, more a steady gnawing worry less words than worry perpetual worry cut by distraction—

Trees near Bungalow Cee
 summarily cut down
The OA on Netflix cancelled
 Trump isn't impeached yet

The wooden floor of this cafe, its view of tall buildings & a dusky sky
 How the endless universe shrinks to the size of one's hopes & worries
 Zeke Elliott holding out on Dallas Cowboys for a fairer contract
Spiderman: Far From Home the last of the classic run of Marvel Cinematic Universe films, over 11
 years—

"Secrets of Wytner Revealed!" claims the commercial on my black & white TV—*"What fortunes this will
 bring you!"*

"Dream-Mind-Is-Supra-Consciousness!"

"Learn to puff worlds from your very fingertips!"

*"Because the world is round
 It turns me on—
 Because the wind is high
 It blows my mind—
 Love is old, Love is new
 Love is all, Love is you—"*
 —The Beatles, 1969.

Fill this page flying blind too many gadgets too little unique soul too many excuses not enough kindness
"Marijuana is legal. Know the laws" the giant neon sign blares how to live right in all moments *"Oh
 that magick feeling, oh where'd it go"* The Beatles, 1969, anything anyone anytime can be magick
 the right key in the right keyhole the right touch the right word once twice breathe relax *"1-2-3-4-
 5-6-7 All good children go to Heaven"* The Beatles, 1969, *Secrets of Wytner* found in your dreams
 like everything else hard asked, is supra-consciousness, is supra-consciousness, supra supra supra
 conscious con conscious supra Wytner Wytner *"Here comes . . . the . . . Sun . . . King . . ."* The Beatles,
 1969, www.PurpleBeamBindery.com, yes, the secret is metamorphosis & release, clench & release,
 clench & release, clench & release, clench & release, can you hear the silence I can hear it too, can I
 please listen to the silence & share it with you, guitars get harder louder everything raises raises raises,
"Yah! Yah! Yah!" The Beatles, 1969, the hunger never ends willingly the reach, the touch, the want,
 tellmetellmetellmetellmetellmetellmetellmetellme

*Tell me
 Tell me
 Tell me
 Tell me
 Tell me
 Tell me*

*How to live forever & love everyone evermore, the rest of this wastes the worlds hours & I don't know what
 it's for*



Wytner *secret secret*
Wytner *secret*

Black & White Television
w/
Antennar 200

Do you see
Do you see

Do you see?

Fear eats all in the end & spits out bones & dust to bury & blow

"Once there was a way
to get back home
Sleep pretty darling, do not cry
& I will sing a lullaby"
The Beatles, 1969

Boy!
Carry that weight
Carry that weight
A long time
The Beatles 1969

I fall back on my old futon, stars blowing through the ceiling

"Carry that weight
a long time!"

The TV gets louder & louder
as I can't move, can't open
my eyes, only

Oh yeah
At night
Are you gonna be in
my dreams...
at night
The Beatles, 1969

~~The Walls Fall Away~~
~~The World Releases~~
 This is how it

ends
 & this is how it
 begins

new
 You! Curtains!
 Yes!

[And in the end
 the love you take
 is equal to
 the love you make
 —The Beatles, 1969.]

My beloved deep in the
 White Woods, newly returned
 from Wytnes.

H m m m m m m m

cxviii.

Mary Gall sent me along anyway. She told me to take a leave of absence from teaching, to go find *that damned Island*—

Most creation myths or origin myths are fairly well documented & easy to research. This one eluded all that. Something deeper than a secret; more like a whole explaining layer to things that was nearly unknown & yet still *live in the world*, not artifact or old ruin or the shards of ancients' beliefs upon which centuries had built, & changed, & distorted, & built some more.

"It's dreams, Mary Gall," I'd say to her, too many times to recall, in that weird corner office of hers back then, sort of triangular in shape, its long look over the green campus & the mountains & Woods

beyond—

She'd smile, nod, sigh, in some order. She knew I was here in this university, in the literature department she headed, because of dreams, because I had persuaded her that my former profession, freelance photographer, was some kind of basis to be allowed to teach books.

We'd met in dreams, tho did not know each other's names or waking lives, or even if the other one was waking real.

We met on a long-distance bus, many dreams of this bus ride.

I told her of my travels with the Commandeer Cacklebird, aboard her Space Tugboat, into the far reaches of Outer Space, to visit the mysterious semi-habitable planetoid of the now-retired Mulronie the Space Pirate. This was, of course, my dreaming life only.

She, in turn, told me of the world's origins, of its unitive times when the Six Islands clustered as one—until the Blue Suitcase was sent back in time by the Architect to splash in the waters waking & spooking the Islands to flee their cluster. There was always more to this each time we met—

I would talk about my trips aboard the Space Tugboat, how the Commandeer loved to honk “TooT! TooT!” & cackle merrily as we flew past quasars & pulsars & other phenomenar—

She would explain how the source Island bore somewhere within it a mysterious Gate, a Tangles Gate, where answers might be found—

I would tell how Mulronie only let me come & take his portraits if I used a green friend of his to take pinlight photos—the process was goopy, though, pink goopy, till the pictures would emerge as though grown from the planetoid's soil itself—

She talked a lot about a Princess, from elsewhere, come here like many others fleeing their own world's destruction—hoping this could be their new home—

These dreams by waking's reck went on for several years while I continued my non-outer-space photography work—I began to look into any form of photography that could be called “goopy” or somehow pink.

I looked deeper & deeper into libraries for books on Gates & Islands & Princesses & all of that, in any possible form or combination. I found less than nothing. I knew.

“What don't we know?” I asked her, in what was our last bus ride.

She paused, green eyes firing brightly, smiled. “Have to just wake up to each other now.”

cxix.

Mulling. Two months of this summer, & half of it trying to find a new job. Maybe close to finding one. Seems & feels that way—

Only one path forward will occur, of the many possibles right now. Little prescient of what to come yet it's funny how I've found myself preparing more, or less, for one interview or another.

Seven years ago in the summer I was jobhunting, with fewer possibles, because a crashed economy, but also less of an impressive resume to show.

Now different for both of these. I get consideration more often & more seriously. I was laid off by one employer, paid a bit & pointed away, like that, quick.

Others nose forward, seem to value what another discarded.

It's all nice enough but, meanwhile, no actual check coming right now.

Have to smile friendly.

Talk smart yet humble.

Exude appeal as I am able.

Move through the mystery

of what connects one to

another special.

It's not arbitrary, how what happens, happens. Humans make deeply emotive choices, foundation to rationale, to practicality, to possibility—

There are gone faces I would like to talk about this with—writing places I'd like to be at again with my pens & notebooks, & this new-old puzzle.

I would like to believe I bring something good to the table. An intelligence, humor, patience, curiosity. Some still golden spark of youth.

An abiding wish to learn how to do better.

Characters & settings tempt me come, re-direct this past-midnight pondering. Sleep lightly calls too.

Yes's *Keys to Ascension* on Polly iPod, a deeply sweet & fine live album; I had it 20 years ago as a double-cassette for my Walkmans.

Acid happy high coming down the center of Carnal Street toward Bell Rock Cemetery, a nod & greeting to the spirits there & then onto my ZombieTown hovel. This music encouraging me for sure along my unsure way.

I had a paycheck at my last job, but the joy, the sense of belonging, of *mattering*, diminished over time.

Yet I caught a deep taste for the idea of building good processes for producing good work. I cared about my payjob in a way not dissimilar to these pages & their like. The work mattered even as the workplace filled with poison. Greed, indifference. So many good people shown the door in hardly a few hours of a single day.

It seemed, in the end, that the work I did was valuable & needed, & yet paying me to do it was not.

Nothing about human behavior is completely predictable, & clinging too much to theories & patterns & tendencies is sure to produce failure at some point.

It's dangerous to be too sure of desire, its much, its lack.

It's more like insisting within a patience to let the tumblers fall & click into place, & *then* decide, & *then* nod.

Not knowing fully, *never* will know fully, & yet have to act, words, movements, have to cohere along, like wings on breeze—

What matters is
 what you create
 who you love
 what you gift the world
 what you teach
 how you listen
 how wide open your hands
 your eyes
 your mind

how you seek & love beauty
 how you tend & protect

who you let near you
 what you let near you
 why you open & close

I don't know big sure answers but I know kindness matters, however received

Smiles matter, touch matters

music matters so much

Learning is good
 Remembering matters
 The known & the novel are
 equivalently important

harm to body ≈
 harm to mind

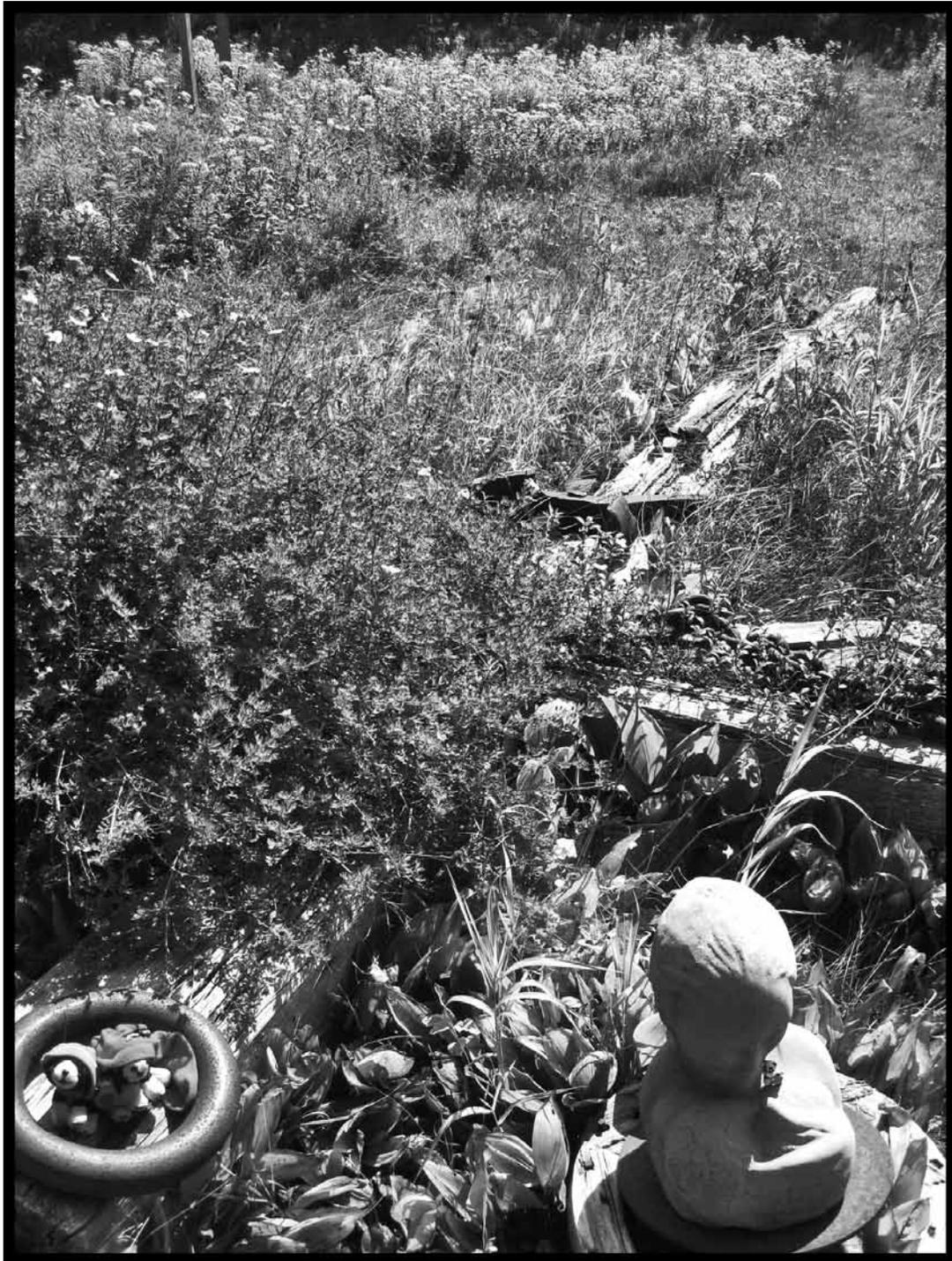
love to body ≈
 love to mind

I do not understand my value to others but feel it occur, usually with an inner start—

The world does not end if you or I stop caring. But it is at least different, & maybe lesser—

The can on this desk warns:
DO NOT SHAKE!
DO NOT SHAKE!

I believe this world is beautiful & worth saving from the bastards who'd chew & swallow it till nothing left—



I believe in hope tho I do not always feel it. Yet it returns, in countless moments & ways.

Writing this book, 13 years & near 3600 pages, & counting, *matters*. Whatever that means, this book *matters*.

Will I have the wanted job when these pages resume & will it be still wanted when in hand? I don't know. I hope so. I hope so.

Good ganja.

Good shrooms.

Good world or mostly trying.

Good night.

A week passes, still waiting the sure answer, the *offer letter*, it's called. Delayed by paperwork, but more assurance than I had a few days ago—a few more days pend—

Write about this at 1:20 in the morning? or get back to the main work here, having spake my waits & worries enough for now—

Let me lay out my process here. Coins & dice help me decide which earlier sections of this Part Eleven of *LX* to mix up, along with some 2018 Dream Raps. Three sections of the former, plus one of thirty-five Dream Raps—toss coins, roll dice, find new sections not mixed up yet, & go, & see what happens. Be right back . . .

[Got it! Here goes.]

“*United Earth* was more than one thing, & changed over time. It was an appealing but elusive idea, meant to lure but not explain too much.

“Why? Because it had to mean many things to many kinds of people. And it had to convince the ships overhead that this world was worth saving, that abandoning it completely would be a mistake.

“Why were those ships still up there? The decision to let this world eat itself up & perish had been made long ago.

“The Emandians had left, following the decision made to move on. And yet, some lingered. Ships overhead lingered. Emandians scattered through the population lingered. This world was a violent one, & thus violent beings in countless kinds roamed, swam, flew its many miles. Violence informed a successful will to survive, & weakness or passivity did not win out most of the time. What survived tended to do so at the cost of others, though mortality owned all. Mortality bred the violence, its hunger for food, sex, warmth, safety, & none of these sure to last any.

“It was not a world like Emandia so much, & yet . . . something. There was tenderness too. Beauty in the many landscapes, many kinds of weather, countless forms of life.

“It would all end badly. It did so, over & over, extinction after extinction. And yet up rose more, no quit in the world's deep force.

“The ships did not leave, & many down below remained, outliving countless generations of every kind

& species. Wondering if something *else*, something *better*, something *saving*, could occur. Could it?"

Kinley woke first from this lesson offered in dreams. Looked around. Oh. The Cavern under the Tangled Gate. Napping Creatures all around. Um. *How?*

cxl.

Raise the game. What else is there to do? Why eat so many psychedelics & not push for more? More of me in every possible way.

I feel like I trifercate among *dreamspace*, *tripspace*, & *daytime space*, like I concede a lot of hours to . . . getting money.

So it's not daytime space. It's *moneyspace*. That's all I can call it. In this space of hours, someone owns me & directs my actions. And can expel me at anytime.

And did recently. And now I'm auditioning for a new master. Slinging skills & experience for cash. That's what it is. I don't know if it was anything more. Jobs seem to come & go, & their relationships too—I don't have many exceptions to show by contrary—

Another chance fell through, two especially good ones in the weeks I've been whoring for new—

I do not believe that's all there is to it—

But—*raise the game*

How to alter *moneyspace*? Is that possible? Should the years bring a shrinking of ideals or a bettering of them? A seasoning of them to survive?

Can one get better at being one's self? At being human?

*"What happens to people?
They quit holding on."
—Deerhunter 2019.*

How to integrate the varied, seeming varied, spaces?

*Never stop feeling.
Never stop thinking.
Never stop listening.
Never stop trying.
Never let failure extract more than its due.*

Learn, adapt, eat failure's lessons, & shat the rest.

Moneyspace slows me, my imagination, my instincts—& also rushes me, too fearful, too eager to please—often unsure myself, the ground I stand on—

Dreamspace, I little control & wish I did more. Shape the fire, learn how to dance it better—

Tripspace are my mind's doors widest open—watching clouds above this city café reshape moment by moment—

Moneyspace I arrive to by day, tired, time to beg again, uncertain & scared—& yet having to show confidence, eagerness, willingness to please whomever will, or might, pay.

An endless line of white-clad souls pass nearby, bound for a secret soiree—I'm thinking that when night comes to this city, things change, & what was Elliptical City becomes Gay E.C., a place full of artistes & radicales, & there is a place I know, called La Grande Studio B, where I will go to smooth my furors away—

The hostess of the Studio is a pink-&-bloo piglet Creature named Ancienne Cookiée, or A.C. for short—

She lets me in with a friendly smirk & knows my steps bound for La Sens-O-Rama!

Through a green door with a golden doorknob & into a round room, a row of folded seats to the left of the door—

“Enjoy, mon ami!” she cries, as I go.

Like the unitive times so ancient ago, I become the bloomy scent I sniff, the sweet taste on my tongue tastes me back, I am soft as the world is soft, run every color through *hmmmming* in & above & through all, world will let me shape all this or shape me new by its will & whim—

Raise the game

It becomes different the higher the harder the deeper in—

You want more?

Give more.

Not harder or easier or harder than this.

Give a fuck. Give two. Give many.

Another job interview today, so another several hours at auditioning, faces to persuade, faces to please, shake my mind's ass for a job—it's all words, not actual work—not a *real* audition with a script or a song to perform—whatever I do for those faces versus the others who try—

Come here after, this Au Bon Pain Café, Copley Place Mall, Boston, Back Bay, because back in 1992 & through 1994 I lived a walk from here as a graduate student & came here Sundays in summer with my *Boston Globe* to run through the “Help Wanted” ads—used to cut them out, tape 'em to notebook paper, mail resumes or make phone calls—keep track—it's fuck 2019 & I do the same thing now with emails & a job tracker spreadsheet on Eurydice—

I was laid off six weeks ago yesterday—I've been to half a dozen in-person interviews, countless phone calls & emails—shaken my mind's ass for many—getting incrementally better at it—pimping up my resume, got new interview shoes—

Another tomorrow, by phone, & gotta call the unemployment office, ain't gotten nothing from them, not a fucking cent of what I'm owed.

Brought this book along because I want all this live on the page, all the begging for a chance to shake my mind's ass by telephone or in an unmemorable conference room—

I'm damned tired of it, & scared of it, & pissed off about it.

This cafe's glass walls show a city's busy intersections, cars & buses & hurrying souls. Tall buildings, the glass ceiling shows the heights of, & strange trip-hoppy music to color its cafeteria innards. Trees out there too, been growing there years, perfect green.

Give a flying flapjack

Give many flying flapjacks

I'm still in this, still trying, still being, my hungry hopeful self. *It's hard.* But there's *harder* in this world. Maybe next job I'll do better, fit in more, find a way to give back deeper.

I can do this.

I will do this.

And I'll not forget this lone helpless feeling again.

I'll do better by good fortune when it comes



To be continued in Cenacle | 110 | December 2019

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*WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES
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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Lisa Bieberman lives in Farmington, Maine. She did a lot of great work on behalf of the psychedelic revolution in the 1960s, in particular running the Psychedelic Information Center in Harvard Square, & publishing for many years the *PIC Bulletin*, which was an invaluable resource for trustworthy information in a time when this was far harder to get than now.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. His shaggy-wild prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He wrote to me recently: “Bones still busted and I’m lathering at the mouth to dig Spanish treasure, hills of jewels, and drive my hover into the heart of madness (wherever I can find it). But enforced chilling here as I drag through quack-ass doctors. It is suburbia, but somehow feels like a Belizean jail without the urine-stained concrete. I tell myself . . . this too will pass.” More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>. Hang tough, Charlie!

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His fiction appear occasionally in *The Cenacle*. His work in this issue is excerpted from *States of Mercy: A Novel*, published by Alien Buddha in June 2019. “It’s a fiction year,” he tells me. “I wish it were a fictional year,” he adds. Tell it, brother.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. “Dylan show soon?” he entices. His 2000 poetry RaiBook, *North of Jersey*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/northofjersey.html>.

John Echem lives in Nigeria & teaches English at local schools. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 108 | June 2019. We’ve been talking about him writing about Nigerian culture, & its current crisis he describes thusly: “The Nigeria of today is not the jewel that was given to Nigerians by their forebears.”

ElectroLounge Forums is a discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at <http://electrolounge.boards.net/>. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these forums to meet, & perhaps join, those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

Robert Frost was born in 1874 in San Francisco, California, & died in 1963 in Boston, Massachusetts. He is one of the 20th century’s greatest poets. Scriptor Press published a volume of his poetry called *The World Will End in Fire: Selected Poems of Robert Frost* as part of the 2002 Burning Man Books series. This volume can be found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her recent news: “I’ve just retired from teaching English, and am now teaching mindfulness in my school and privately. A good change.” Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html>.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His prose appears frequently in *The Cenacle*. His most recent book is *Many Worlds: A Collection of Poems*, published by Modern Memoirs in March 2019. Regarding my jobless woes he offered me this comfort: “you’ll get something, but getting from A to B on all that stuff can be a real bitch, we both know.” So true. Thanks!

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His most recent book is *Bat Dreams (Nighttime Daydreams Book 2)*, published by Amazon in February 2019. It can be found online at: <https://tinyurl.com/yyw3g6sv>. Today found him “locked in a death struggle with a 52-page economics paper. Either the paper or I is going to walk away alive.” I’m betting on you, Nate!

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Late getting hold of him for a poetry phone call, I received this note from him: “I got to take the wife out. It’s her day off. Have a stroll on the bike trail in Amherst. Stop at a bookstore. Bite to eat . . .” His most recent book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press in 2017.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. Regrettably, no longer a work colleague of mine, but life has a funny way of bringing people back together again . . .

Sam Knot lives in rural France. His poetry now appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. We’ve been working together on getting his piles high of writings out into the world. Also visit samknot.com for more of his work.

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry & prose appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She also hosts the excellent poetry show, “Where the Most Light Falls,” on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). She has also been interviewing for new jobs. *Bon chance!*

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her recent book of poetry, *Blues for French Roast with Chicory*, will be published by Deerbrook Editions in November 2019. “Smoking: A Love Song” appears in that volume under the title “Bad Habits.” Great new work! More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

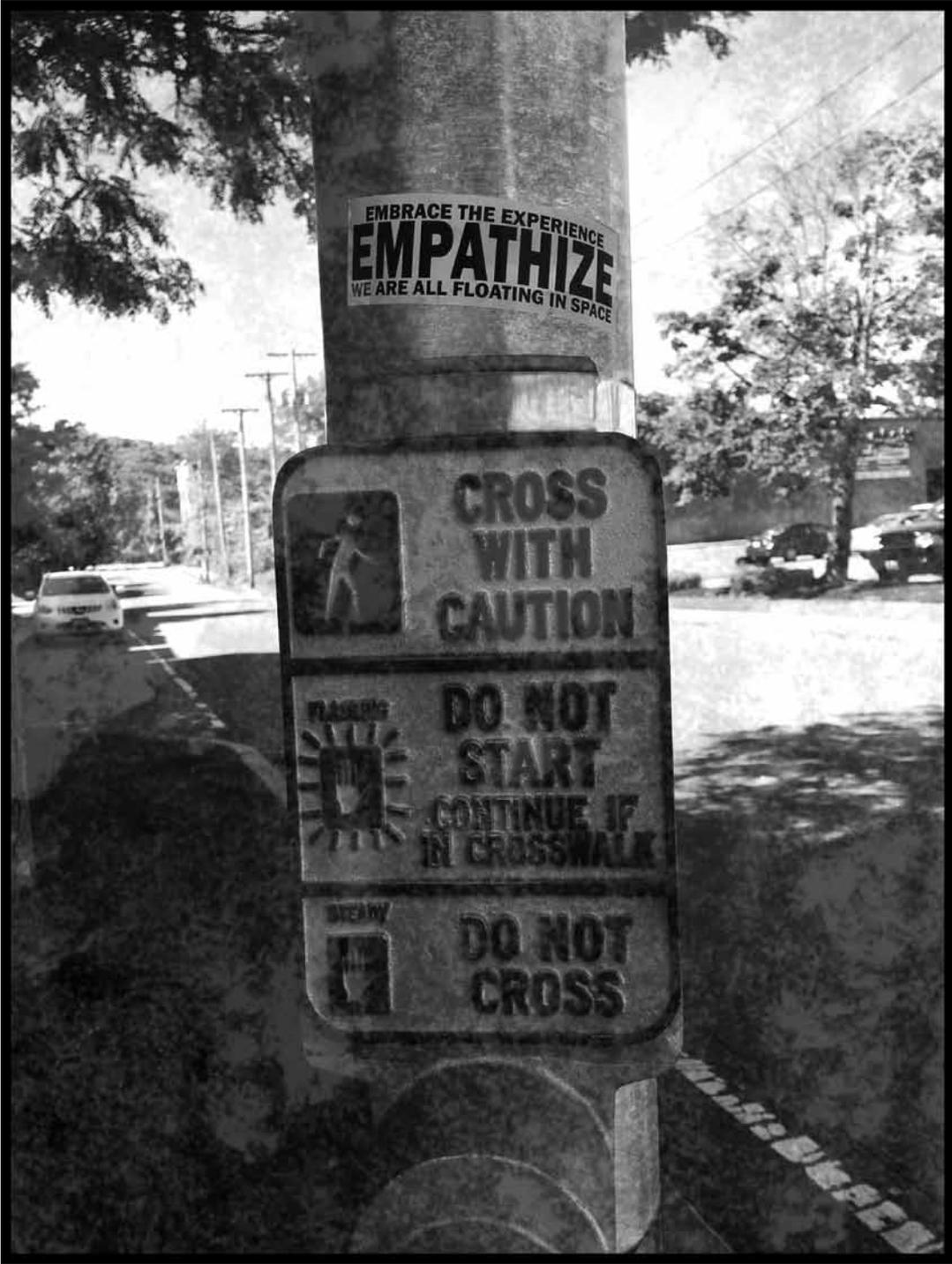
Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Hoping he is doing well & his keyboard is ever-busy. His newest book of poetry is called *Jock Poems and Reflections for Proper Bostonians*, published by Pocol Press in March 2019.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She outshines ’em all.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Not quite finished scraping joblessness off my skin, but close.

* * * * *





EMBRACE THE EXPERIENCE
EMPATHIZE
WE ARE ALL FLOATING IN SPACE



**CROSS
WITH
CAUTION**



**DO NOT
START
CONTINUE IF
IN CROSSWALK**

STEADY



**DO NOT
CROSS**

