



The Cenacle

Number 46 June 2001

**"It is simply that having once found the intensity of art,
nothing else that can happen in life can ever again seem
as important as the creative process."**

*F Scott Fitzgerald,
letter to H. L. Mencken,
23 April 1934*

From Soulard's Notebooks

-29-

June 29, 2001
11:42 p.m.
Newman Rd. - bed
Malden, MA.

Dear Jim,

Ages since I wrote ya, doing so now an act of hope, a fragment anyhow, wanting to believe more than I do in good days to come—

Boston is shoving me toward my endtime here—hard to get a job, & then my bastard landlord ups my rent— as tho Malden has some other appeal than cheaper rent than Boston— from \$500/month to \$550, the greedy bastard— in a city, a whole region, fully greedy bastards—

Moving on won't be easy in many ways— never is— but I've grown to hate this area— its crowdedness, its dirt, its rudeness— its appeal long ago is gone— I'm hopeful that other places are no so a-sweet

-30-

in the grab & get - someday long after
I've left what Boston has become will
be more generally known -

for now I need work & a new
place to live - & the kind of hope
I've not felt in a long while -
this weekend the 100th Jellicoe Guild
meeting & E46 finish for awhile my
obligations to those projects - next
couple of months for other things
including Burning Man 2001 - can't
fucking wait!

Well, it will be fun coming down
tho I will be in CT less than 18
hours this time - getting to better
places is going to be hard - I need
to begin ASAP -

The life of Art takes all & de-
mands everything - yet there
are rewards - sooner or later -
just keep fucking swinging - hehe -

A & V, 6-29-2001

The Cenacle

Number 46 June 2001

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Accompanying cassette features highlights from 11/4/2000 & 12/9/2000 Jellicle Literary Guild meetings held at Roma Restaurant, New Britain, CT.

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Thanks to all the contributors to this issue . . . it is an especially good one because of the people who came through :)

Thanks to my new friends at spiritplants.com & lycaeum.org, as well as my older ones at Land's End chatroom, for keeping my spirits up during some struggling times . . . friends online or off are precious . . .

Thinking of you, Leni, blonde muse, as always, wondering what next in our strange story, not knowing in the least . . .



Fiction: G. C. Dillon

The Haunting of Yusif

It began on a night seemingly younger than the newborn Spring, yet still older than the bright, full moon that shone down. It began, as so many tales of this kind often do, in a tavern. The *Sleeping Albatross*, to be precise. It began at the table of one Khim Te-Yung. Khim was—depending on which of the numerous rumors being passed amongst the other patrons you wished to believe—the captain, or merely the navigator on one of the too few merchant vessels in the city's harbor. Khim's ship, a full-bellied galleon, was known as the *Dawn Breaker* in the Eastern tongue. Some saw Khim as a pirate with the darkest heart. Other rumors had Khim as traveller from far off Ulthar, where no man may kill a cat, or that he has sailed his ship upon the lake Hali at Hastur, or voyaged the length of the Yann, or even that he has set foot upon Kadath in the Cold Waste itself. To the eye, Khim looked to be a standard Easterner. Not that many in the city had ever seen an Easterner. His hair was thin and black, drawn back into a long ponytail. Mustache and goatee danced about his mouth. His eyelids drew attention to the man's foreignness and created an illusion of mystique as wispy as a Spring morning mist. Even the serving wenches had gotten into the game of speculating about Khim. They wondered if he sported a tail beneath his silken pantaloons. Khim twisted his thin mustachios, trying to decide which of the women had the best chance to find out the truth. It began with...

"Ghosts!" cried Shev Yusif. The Caravan Master sat at Khim's table. They had, earlier in the day, negotiated a deal on bolts and bolts of silk Khim's ship had carried to harbor. The two had come to the tavern to celebrate the bargain. "Ghosts," Yusif repeated into his fourth—or was it merely third?—stein.

"Ghosts?" questioned Khim.

"Ghosts. I've seen 'em."

"In this establishment?" Khim's eyes danced about the room, searching for some trace of the preternatural. Disappointed, his gaze returned to the Caravan Master. Shev Yusif was tanned almost to the point of leather. An eye-patch covered his left socket, and a long, cruel scar accompanied it.

"The ghosts of Tyrantheol."

"Tyrantheol that was Swallowed by the Desert? You do have a higher class of spooks about you, my new friend."

"And what does a yellow water-rat like you know of Tyrantheol?"

"I know many things," Khim replied. His interest in the night had peaked. He had planned to return to

his ship and read a few passages from the *Writings of the Great Philosopher* before retiring to bed in the full moonlight. Khim liked the moon, liked standing watch beneath it, and his favorite place of all was his moon-watching tower on his aged father's *han* at home. But here was a tale of Tyrantheol. A legend scarcely few had heard of. A legend of the city that had made the Old Gods jealous and was thusly destroyed. A tale of that forsaken city's ghosts.

"I knew Tyrantheol before the desert reclaimed her. I knew her in her glory. Her shame."

"You must have been very young." Khim waved over one of the serving wenches and ordered another wine for himself and a stout for Yusif.

"I was sixteen and the first over the wall at the assault!" Shev Yusif bellowed. Khim smiled. Wasn't it centuries since he was last sixteen?

"I've seen them ever since. And not the same one either. Peasant, nobleman, craftsman. I've seen them all. Why once, I may have seen the Pale Prince himself!" Yusif's right hand made the sign of a lesser God's blessing.

Khim tasted his wine. It was dry and slightly nutty. He pushed Yusif's stein closer to the man. "But why are you graced with visits by the shades of this long gone city? Surely, they have some sweeter rest to find elsewhere."

"For I have something of Tyrantheol. A memento of my foolish youth. We were warned by the vizier to bring nothing out of the ruins, but to lay it waste in wreck and rapine."

"You did not heed the words of that venerable vizier, did you, Shev Yusif?"

"No, curse upon me. I did not. A simple trinket, I thought. Nothing more."

"Something you took. Let me see. Something valuable, no doubt. A thing cherished amongst Tyrantheol's people." Khim stopped, stroking his goatee in thought. "Not the crown jewels, Shev Yusif?" Khim smiled a wide smile.

"A sword," said Yusif. "Just a sword."

"A sword?" repeated Khim.

"Not a large one. Not a jeweled one. Just a sword."

"But whose sword? One of the Pale Prince's Knights' broadswords? Or a sinful merchant's eunuch's scimitar? Come tell, Shev Yusif, whose blade did you spirit out of that land, whose weapon has become an open invitation for haunting spirits that can find no other rest? Oh! You must tell me, Shev Yusif. Whose sword?"

"A woman's." Yusif said, clutching tightly his stein. He had not drunk in a some time. Not since this tale had begun to be told. "A mother's perhaps. That is, if the child she was defending was from her womb."

"Mother? Child?" asked Khim.

"It is not a pretty thing to destroy a city," Yusif spoke. "Not pretty even when you are only sixteen and believe the words of the clerics and the viziers." Finally he drank. Yusif emptied his stein and placed it loudly on the table with a deeply hollow thud. The serving wench hurried over with another. Khim threw some coppers upon the wooden table and shooed her away quickly. Gone were thoughts of an upstairs room, gone were thoughts of tails and of a night's romp. Yusif's story was all that was in Khim's mind.

"Hers was the first ghost to find me, but not the last." Yusif paused, finding that his courage to tell his tale rested at the bottom of his stein. "They come to me to see me die. To see me suffer the fate of Tyrantheol. To witness my misery. All these years, they come to me when I am in danger, when death has my name on his foul tongue. They wait only for death to speak '*Shev Yusif*' and draw me to his rotting bosom.

"As I passed through the desert without water, they were there. When I defended my caravan from raiders, they were there. When fevers and sickness drove me to bed, they were there as well."

"Why have you not sold the sword? Or left it somewhere, at the bottom of a deep well, perhaps?"

"They will not let me," Yusif said. "I've kept it hidden all these years. I have not used it as a sword should be used. Not in battle, nor in accolade, or even as trophy in my tent. I hid it from the first day." He reached into his cloak and brought forth an object no more than three feet long. Slowly, Yusif unwrapped the burlap covering, revealing his sword plundered from Tyrantheol. It was a wide, curving blade. To Khim, it resembled a small falchion. It was not jeweled, but Khim saw the blacksmith's craftsmanship in the weapon. It looked to be a flexible, resilient weapon. Fine leather wrapped about the hilt and guard was simple. For an instant, Khim desired to reach out for the sword. He stopped himself. His eyes moved up to Shev Yusif's. Khim could see the tears in those eyes. He said nothing.

* * *

Khim Te-Yung wrapped his cloak about his shoulders to shield himself from the cold wind blowing off of the harbor. He fashioned his large decorative clasp at the shoulder. It was etched with numerous hermetic sigils. He bade farewell to Shev Yusif; they would meet tomorrow morning to trade silk for gold. Khim listened to his own booted steps as he strode to the *Dawn Breaker*. Then another sound came to his ears. The sound of steel being drawn. Khim turned and ran back the way he had come.

Shev Yusif stood before a cutpurse. The thief was dressed all in black. A black hood covered her face. She held two long daggers at the ready.

At the sight of Khim, the Caravan Master cried out, "Oh, you try to rob me." The cutpurse turned and seeing Khim drew back her arm to throw one of her daggers at him. The projectile flew straight for Khim, but at the last second before it would have struck him, it turned in the air, deflected as if by a strong wind. Khim grasped the clasp of his cloak, beckoning his vesper air elemental to return to the amulet, and promising it an offering of plum wine mixed with blood when he returned to the ship.

It was then that Khim saw the ghosts.

It was not the scent of sorcery or the sound of magik; it was simply shadows of the otherworld that Khim sensed. He was sure the cutpurse saw nothing. Not a single one of the legion of Tyrantheol who watched Shev Yusif. How many of them did Yusif himself see? Khim wondered. Khim looked to the faces of the ghosts. Expectant they were. They were waiting—or hoping for something. Surely not just Yusif's death as the Caravan Master had lamented so much about this very night. Khim sensed—and he was a very good sensor—that it was some other dark feature of this night, of this encounter with the city's underworld

that they breathlessly and eternally awaited.

Yusif drew the falchion against the thief. Yusif was quick. He drew and slashed at his opponent in one smooth motion, but the ghosts were faster. As the blade was coming around toward the thief, a ghost took the hilt in his spectral hand. The blade passed through the cutpurse like moonlight. The woman's other dagger buried itself in Shev Yusif's throat. She grabbed his purse and fled, not even pausing to glance back at Khim.

Khim approached Shev Yusif's body. The ghosts of Tyrantheol crowded about it. He stared for a moment at the man he had shared an evening with. A man alone except for his ghosts. The falchion lay next to the body. Khim wrapped the sword in the finest silk spun by his father's mulberry eaters.

"Damned enchanted swords," he said, looking to the smiling faces floating about him. How long had they waited for this moment? How long till Shev Yusif took a hold of his trinket, his simple sword to defend his life? And when that moment came, they acted, gripping the very falchion taken from the dead hands of their comrade, grasping the sword and taking its essence with them into the spectral world for just an instant. An instant long enough to extract their revenge. A moment Khim stared at them and then they were gone to imagined eternal peace.

Khim Te-Yung was never to be visited by the ghosts of Tyrantheol again.

G.C. Dillon
June 2001



Tom Baker, Dr Who
Patty Kisluk
pencil

Poetry: Joe Ciccone

LEAVING LAS VEGAS

bound far from this place of secondary things, all things hanging,
purposeless.

seconds pass without stopping.
around me, paper mache mock-ups of things not built to last,
not by ancient man, not by Sinatra.

babylon is long gone, baby.

ahead of me, endless canyons, below me, sky of water;
and i'm thinking of my role as an artist. i close my eyes,
dream of bending the blues like a blind ex-brakeman from Baton Rouge.

give me my martin and a glass of whiskey quick.

i summon a ride on the last neon locomotive,
and sail back into the true breech.

Travel Journal: Barbara Brannon

Key West in Early March

WHAT'S it like to leave the blustery late-winter workweek of home and travel to someplace warm? I've never done anything like that before—I wouldn't know. But I'm about to find out.

Our flight leaves Charlotte at 10:30 Thursday night—we're in Miami two hours later. We sleep only until daybreak so not to miss a minute of new adventure. At six, the huge round moon is still shining over the sparkling lagoons and streetlights; we're in the car and headed down U.S. 1 before the sun even peeks over the Miami rooftops.

The day starts out a little chilly for shorts but soon is warm enough for us to venture taking the top of the convertible down. We stop at one of the roadside parks that line the Keys highway, and we're on our way past Mile Marker 88 of this same highway we were driving northward in Maine a couple years ago—now headed south for Mile Marker Zero.



Key West Lighthouse

Conversation in the courtyard

The breeze that has just begun to stir through the palms and poincianas carries her with it into the leafy courtyard. Her long, straight, blond hair plays off her skin like the sun's highlights piercing into the shadowed depths of the foliage. The maitre d' greets her with a fond smile and a lilting *Good morning*.

"Sun or shade?" he asks her.

"Here, where it's warmer, she says. "For three, this morning. Scott's coming too."

He lifts his eyebrows in another half-smile. She flips the long tail of her open flannel shirt aside and seats herself in one of the bistro chairs. She stretches her long tan legs, covered to mid-calf in capri pants the color of chamois, and flexes her toes in her leather sandals. A silver ring glints on one toe.

Before the coffee arrives, a young man slides into the seat beside her. She looks up at his sunglass-shaded eyes through her own dark lenses. He bends toward her, brushing her lips in greeting.

"How good to see you, darling."

"And you. You look wonderful."

As he settles into his seat she leans in his direction, meshing her knee between his, and kisses him full and long.

"Wasn't last night a riot?"

"I hope you had a good time."

They embrace across the corner of the café table, each dragging their chairs slightly closer in. They kiss again, passionately, eyes shut, hands careless of discreetly spying patrons.

They do not hear the approach of the man who must be Scott, but he makes his arrival known by stopping behind her and kissing the top of her head, at the spot where the light touches it. She breaks free and pulls him by the hand into the opposite chair, just as the host returns with the coffee.

"You will stay and join us, won't you?," she says. "Here, sit." This to the host, who takes a moment to chat with the trio but soon must return to his duties. Over strong hot coffee the conversation among the remaining friends turns quieter, melts to intimacy in the warming day.



Saturday: We start our day shortly after six with strong Cuban coffee and breakfast sandwiches on Cuban bread. We take our meal out to the little beach at the end of the street. We are soon greeted by a beach bum who calls himself Key Wasted. He wears a straw hat pierced with a joint at a fishing lure and a few other oddments, and around his neck is a coconut on which he has drawn a face. He tells us how he rescued it, floating, from the ocean and so calls it The Old Man of the Sea.

At Higgs Beach, a few blocks away, the beach-sleepers aren't even awake yet. Out at the far end of the pier, three eager spring-breakers are enthusiastically discussing the merits of various computer technologies. One has a small digital camcorder that he trains on the sunrise, on the pelicans, on his companions, and then on a Hemingway-esque old fisherman. The old guy suddenly gets a strike and gives his pole a tug, but as the three

guys come closer with their camera a pelican dives in and snatches the catch. The fisherman turns on the trio with a sharp *Fuck!* and proceeds to curse them roundly for interfering. The camera guy continues shooting as another of the trio baits the old man.

"What wazzat you said?"

"Nothin'."

"We just wanted to watch you fish."

"Fuckin' punks. Won't leave a old man alone."

The third young punk motions to the others. "C'mon, we don't want to cause trouble. Let 'im be."

They click the camera off and shuffle away in their baggy-bottom britches, leaving the old man muttering and re-baiting his ancient hook.



At a cantina on the harborfront, lunch is conch fritters, stone crab claws, and cold Coronas. I've been sketching the boats in the harbor while we lunch, and a deeply tanned fiftyish-looking man from the next table walks over after paying his tab to look over my shoulder.

"You've been drawing the Whale Watcher," he comments. On the page I'm turned to is a nearly finished pen sketch.

"Yeah, it's a nice boat."

"I agree."

"She yours?"

"A friend's. We're out of Ft. Lauderdale, docked here for the afternoon." He admires the drawing, which I offer him. I tear the page out of the book for him and wish him happy sailing.

We return to the guest house for showers and fresh clothes, then drive down to Mallory Square to experience the street theater and music and the sunset. It's as genuine a circus as exists anywhere, in the sense of an infinitely varying combination of spectators mixed with constantly moving collective organism of performers, hawkers, animals. It's a riot of color and sound and light, festival and feast and fun.

On our agenda for the evening, also, is a moonlight cruise on a large catamaran. It's a beautiful, clear, full-moon evening for sailing. There are only a dozen or so passengers on this trip with three crew members—and free-flowing alcohol—so we have a chance to meet nearly everyone. There are two guys and a girl from Sacramento; a fellow from somewhere else in Florida who came down here at the last minute when his friend canceled Vegas vacation plans; and a quartet of men from Atlanta. With the Atlanta guys, we trade tidbits of our introductory questions back and forth with increasing specificity and amusement as

we learn that one couple lives in a house on Pearl Street in East Point—two blocks away from the house I grew up in.

After the boat returns to dock, we part fast friends and agree to get together sometime. Kay and I manage somehow to get the convertible back to our side of the island (good thing the streets are virtually deserted at this hour, all except Duval with its crowds of twentysomething barhoppers and ubiquitous bikes and scooters). Back at the guesthouse, it's a perfect night for a wee-hours skinny-dip in the pool. After an hour in the water, beneath the moonlight and palm fronds, we sleep like babies.





*Orange Tree
Pearl's Patio*

Sunday we have dubbed our “literary day” in Caya Hueso. Our plans are to hit as many of the books-and-writers landmarks as we can without wearing our attention spans out. After breakfast at our little Cuban coffeeshop, we stroll over to the Hemingway House on Whitehead Street. The morning is quite warm already. Inside the air is close, though the tall, arched, wood-framed windows stand open to the sun and breeze. The home Ernest and Pauline bought for \$8,000 and furnished with tastefully eclectic appointments is palatial by island standards; it was even when they bought it for back taxes, as it had been the solidly

constructed and elegantly designed house of a millionaire merchant, Asa Tift (kin to the family who later lent their name to the Georgia county and city).

The black-and-mustard-yellow fish-patterned tiles of the bathroom, combined with the white porcelain of the fixtures; the Spanish tile-front chests; the shelves lined with books, the private writing studio over the guest house all evoke a sense of the gracious but un-fussy lifestyle of the house’s famous occupants. Of course there’s the legendary swimming pool that Pauline built as a surprise for Ernest, with the penny he flung at her in irritation, calling it “his last,” and the cadre of cats. Where, today, does a writer find such a paradise? Dos Passos and Bishop and Frost and Ciardi and Merrill all had the right idea—the tropical lushness and the laissez-faire atmosphere should be conducive to creativity. But it’s rather late to consider key West a discovery even if it is one to you.

Next stop, the Robert Frost Cottage on the Porter family property. On this Sunday when most of the island’s tourists are either soundly hung over or uninterested in literary haunts to begin with, we get a private tour just for the two of us. The Heritage House contains an odd assemblage of local memorabilia and souvenirs of the family’s world travels, a sort of Victoria

and Albert Museum of the Keys. The Frost Cottage itself is undergoing renovations and we can’t see inside it, but it’s easy to understand how the poet found such a welcome refuge here in the back courtyard of Jessie Porter Newton’s estate. I mark it in my memory that every March there’s a Frost birthday celebration here.

*Tour
guide
Jack
Shanahan,
NYC*



The Hemingway House

We pay a visit to Paul at Flaming Maggie's Bookstore on Fleming Street and then drive by Tennessee Williams's home on Duncan Street (which sold to private owners as a



residence in 1992). Toward dusk, showered and rested, we drop in at Blue heron Books for a signing by Anne Beattie. The author is cordial enough, ensconced in her throne at the back of the store and surrounded by all her Keys cronies, but does little to encourage discussions with tourist drop-ins. After exchanging a few words of greeting with the author and the bookstore owners, we're outta there. Too pompous for our blood.

Monday is our departure day, and we are sorry to say goodbye to the island. Kay goes exploring for coffee while I do a bit of reading by the pool, and by midmorning we have the convertible packed to go. One last stop: we visit Nancy's Secret Garden, a haven of forested trails and exotic greenery next to the Marquesa Hotel. Perhaps we may be among the last to see the garden, if a sign bemoaning the threat of loss to \$7,200

worth of back taxes is to be believed. Even paradise has its price.

By eleven we're on Highway 1 again, hopping northward from bridge to bridge, island to island, via this white seam stitched into the azure silk of the ocean. Azure? Perhaps not; it is mostly a pale aqua, a color seen in the glints of opals or on the under-eaves of island roofs or in a scarf I had in the 1960s. But where the spring clouds cast shadows over it, it becomes a milky shade, and where it deepens it takes on a hue somewhere between emerald and sapphire.

We come to the end of the thread, where it becomes the whole cloth of the mainland and widens into the network of freeways, turnpikes, and boulevards that is suburban Miami. The Tamiami Trail takes us all the way east to Biscayne Bay, and I leave Kay at the hotel for her conference and return the car, and rest contentedly on the American Airlines 777 bound for home, waking from the winter dream of paradise. *

Ray Soulard, Jr.

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

*"Think for yourself
& question authority"*

Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Two *continued from Cenacle 45, April 2001*

At the April 1, 1995 meeting, I outlined to the members of the 6 1/2-year-old Jellicle Literary Guild my plan to start up a new magazine called *The Cenacle*. I spoke of wanting our members to be part of a literary renaissance the likes of which had not been witnessed since the 1950s. Four weeks later, on April 29, 1995, *The Cenacle* debuted before this same group at Roma's. This magazine, I believed, would constitute our contribution to the renaissance we so desired.

The Cenacle 1 is 65 numbered pages in length plus 6 unnumbered pages. The cover artwork is by Virginia Bergeron, a black & white etching of a forest stream, printed on tan paper, the only *Cenacle* cover not printed on card stock. Many conventions of the magazine are established in this premiere issue. First of these is the epigraph page right up front. *Cenacle* 1's two epigraphs establish its theme immediately. JG member Mark Shorette writes:

I believe we dwell in mystery—not as a matter of deception on the part of a trickster deity, but as a matter of the course of our own nature and that of the universe—we are infinitely deep and it is infinitely vast. We are capable of catching glimpses of it all, and the whole of existence is caught up in stringing some of these seconds together in a necklace that becomes the talisman of our existence. My God—it is laid so plain and pure before us! We yearn for days



when burnished feet of shining light alight upon a mount and tell of these things, but the vastness and the deep can meet in any second and we will know rather than hear.

"We dwell in mystery" as beings "infinitely deep" within a universe "infinitely vast" promulgates a spiritual perspective, of course, but it also constitutes a mission: to celebrate the mystery, to engage the mystery, & to stand at least somewhat in opposition to the predominant Western scientific paradigm of these past few centuries—in opposition to the belief that humanity is very near to solving the riddles of existence. It is not. Ralph H. Emerson's epigraph catches the spritely enthusiasm of the moment:

Spring has sprung:
The writers are singing again.

He felt this spirit even as he was travelling in California at the time.

Another convention established was a feature that would come to be called "From Soulard's Notebooks." Issue to issue, I select a passage from my journals of the time that speaks to the issue's spirit; this passage is presented as it appears in my journals, that is, handwritten. This approach is a variation on the more standard "letter from the editor" that prefaces many periodicals, & is of the same mindset as Mark Shorette's contention that we can "catch glimpses" of the whole of the universe. It is less contrived & its relation to the magazine is less hierarchical. The epigraphs & the "Soulard's Notebooks" feature set the tone without trying to sum up or conclude definitively.

For this inaugural "Soulard's Notebooks" I selected a letter dated 3/31/95, describing in detail my intentions:

I am trying to bring the Jellicle Guild and its members to the next level of development I believe our group of writers, artists, and musicians to be a significant one, that our monthly-or-so event at New Britain's Roma Restaurant is something worth commemorating in print.

I also believe we have to do this ourselves.

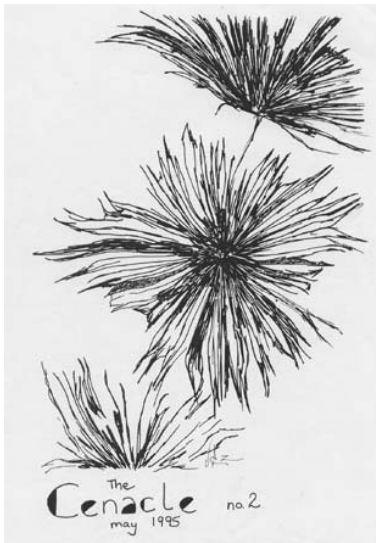
At one point, now years ago, I'd hoped to involve myself in the publishing world on a paid-professional basis. Write for the *Atlantic Monthly* or somesuch.

No more. I won't whore my work for gain. I don't damn the publishing business for others but my own rejection of it is permanent. Between power-hungry fascist liberal academics and multinational corporate jackal publishers, the state of contemporary American literature is in grave peril.

My response? publish a journal paid for from my own pocket, nurture the

talents and goals of my friends within its pages and at the Jellicle Guild. I will carry forth the tradition as I see it in my small way. I will endeavor to make connections on a person-by-person basis to widen my circle. I will retain total control of my projects + treat my colleagues w/respect + w/love.

Three significant points are made here: disillusion with the American publishing establishment; anger at the mishandling of traditionally regarded classics of American literature by academics espousing ideologically-based opinions in college classrooms; & a do-



it-ourselves desire to reconnect with these classics. *Cenacle* 1 was produced using equipment I'd just purchased or already owned. With the means of production in our own hands, & the willingness to pay for the process myself, those I thought of as foes & impediments could be entirely circumvented (in 2001, this spirit has infected musicians as well in the development of MP3 technology—& online file-sharing programs such as Napster & its clones—that allows bands to control the complete process of getting their music to interested listeners, Denied entry into the mainstream world of Art, whatever form it takes, people will often find a different way).

The table of contents notes that the magazine contains an "accompanying cassette" which features "highlights from the April 1, 1995 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting held at Roma Restaurant in New Britain, CT, plus an episode of WRRC Radio hosted by 'Marky Sparky' Bergeron." I was periodicals manager at Quantum Books in Cambridge, Massachusetts at the time, & noticed that many of the computer magazines came with a disk or CD-ROM attached; I thought: why not do this with a literary periodical? Its contents in the early issues were split between highlights of the most recent Jellicle Guild meeting & Mark Bergeron's DJ-style mixes of rock "oldies" mostly from the 1950s & 1960s. These cassettes would enjoy their best success when they reached the hands of people who were not regulars to the Jellicle Guild meetings—& for whom they were a record of gatherings they were unable to attend.

There are nine contributors to the first issue of *The Cenacle*; these nine plus three others filled the magazine's pages exclusively for its first eight issues. The point here is that *The Cenacle* started with a dozen contributors, all (save a work colleague) members of the Jellicle Literary Guild. Thus the magazine was populated with enough voices & visions to climb to a certain height. Issues #1-10 are of a piece. What follows is an overview of the major contributors' pieces.

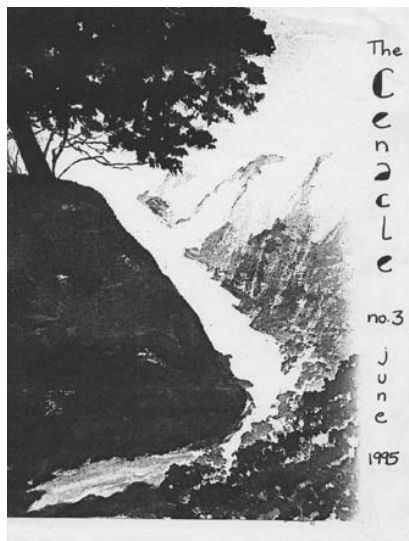
Jim Burke's anecdotal, philosophical letters became a regular feature of *The Cenacle* commencing with #2 May 1995 & are prefaced as follows:

[T]he following is the first in what will be an ongoing series derived from the correspondence between James Burke III and myself, begun when I moved from Connecticut to Boston in 1992, and in the spirit of the more enthused letter-writing tradition of yesterday.

Cenacle 2's letter offers a "state of the world" that argues the following: everyone has the potential to become God-like in nature; humankind's attempt to conquer the earth is futile & ultimately suicidal; & the increasing mutual dependence of technology & culture has led in recent years to greater & more frequent ecological disasters. It concludes with a lengthy account of a night Burke spent at his favorite pub, performing & carousing, & ultimately running into problems with the police. Burke's "state of the world," then, is philosophical, political, artistic, & personal in nature.

Cenacle 3's letter is briefer, beginning with a short tavern anecdote before segueing into a discussion of humankind's potential to become God-like in nature:

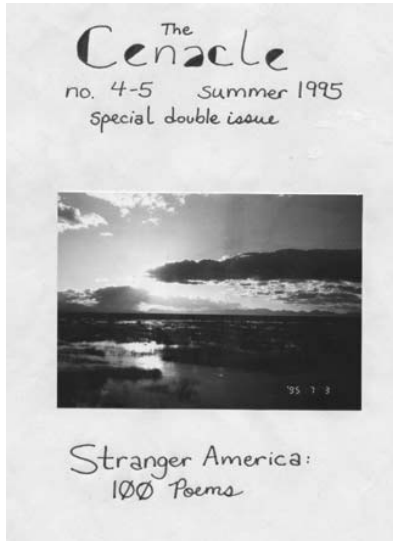
The Hindus believe that all action should be done without regard to the inevitable—life, death, and whatever happens. The Hindus believed that all action should be done without regard to praise or criticism, as long as that action is devoted to the Godhead. Plato seemed to say (in his "Allegory of the Cave") that once a man has attained the truth, he should share it with others. I'm quite sure this is what J.Christ did. The problem I have with both Plato



and Aristotle is that they fail to make a mind-body connection. They disagree with each other on a lot of issues but both of them elaborate on how one should pursue the highest knowledge. They failed to see, however, that the only possible way to attain a mind free from corporeal existence is to become what mankind has the potential to be—Godlike in nature. Only then would we transcend this material plane.

Again & again Burke returns to this theme. Born in 1953 near Boston, witness to & participant in much of the psychedelic revolution of the late 1960s & early 1970s, gifted musician, heavily influenced by his readings in

Eastern mysticism, Burke's letters & his music (as captured on *The Cenacle's* cassettes) embody the sentiment expressed by Shorette that "we dwell in mystery."



Ric Amante's poetry began appearing in *Cenacle* 1 & has been featured in nearly all the subsequent issues of the periodical. Amante's love for God, birds, wine, dancing, & the obscure fellaheen of this world at times murmurs & at times explodes from the page. He extends the poetic tradition reaching back through Ginsberg, Crane, Rilke, Whitman, & Blake all the way back to the great Persian poet Rumi.

"The Hotel Jones" in *Cenacle* 2 is sad music, experience burned down in memory, through time, then re-kindled by the transformative touch of Art. The hotel is a place where lonely figures move through harshly-lit smoky rooms, "whittle throughout this long night." Screams, hacking coughs, sex-noises break the silence. Few letters arrive nor caring

communications of any kind from the outside world. The night gets stranger & stranger for those who cannot sleep. Finally, even the act of telling the Hotel Jones' woeful tale is deemed futile: "The Hotel Jones is a planet/a scourge not a sonnet." There are many in this world right now suffering, not knowing why.

"High Stakes Poker in Maine" in *Cenacle* 6 renders a surreal gaming scene full of eerie images, a place of silence violated by words, by the growling of a coyote, the complaints of the Buddha. The snow restores balance through self-annihilation, & the narrator endorses this action by folding. The game is over, the "sweet" dusky silence is restored. The "high stakes" game is concluded in favor of wordlessness.

"Drunk at the Stove" posits the superiority of living over contemplation, questions over answers, existence over definition. The title locates the speaker in an expanding state of inebriation in which he is considering the orphaned yet eternal state of human hearts, & the truth embodied in sunlight-nicked "banks of February snow," & the exalted state during which one suddenly hears music "through the mere act of looking outward." At this point, the speaker reconsiders his act of cooking as equivalent to his moment-illuminated consciousness, the epiphany arrived at being that love is the "seasoning that baffles, enfolds, and releases us all."



These poems effectively represent the kinds of thematic concerns that run through all of Amante's work in *The Cenacle*. Amante embraces, queries, dances among the mysteries & miracles of existence, sometimes finding clues to his questions in the midst of weeping, or momentarily alighting upon an answer in watching the a hawk circles a patch of empty sky.

Michael McLoughlin's literary essays were featured in a number of early issues of *The Cenacle*. A scholar of 19th & early 20th century American literature (and currently a visiting English professor at the University of South Carolina), McLoughlin published considerations of works by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charles Brockden Brown, & Nathaniel Hawthorne. The best of these, "Jaffrey Pyncheon on the Scaffold: the Violated Heart of The House of the Seven Gables" appeared in *Cenacle* 9-10. This excellent essay argues that the novel can be discussed fruitfully as passing metaphorically through the four chambers of the human heart, the old tired blood of its early chapters thus being cleaned by its final ones.

McLoughlin concludes his discussion:

What stands here at the novel's close as most important is that the creaky old heart of the house is allowed to beat its final living strokes in the purified atmosphere of dead and buried conflicts and newfound life-affirming love; as the betrothed Maules trot off to take up residence in Judge's country estate—the venerable figure of Uncle Venner waving them on, and promising to join them shortly—we may feel that the violated heart of the house they leave behind sits in calm repose, and that the new household toward which they tend will hold, at least for a few fleeting moments after they cross the threshold, the possibility of mortal joy in its timbers.

Not being loaded down with the jargon & abstruse thinking of much contemporary writing about literature, McLoughlin's essays are accessible to academic & non-academic readers alike, & thus embody this periodical's position view that it is the scholar's task to serve the great literature about which he or she writes, rather than using it as fodder in some ivy tower game of theory & revenge.

Jack Heitner, an English professor at Central Connecticut State University, contributed poetry to several early issues of *The Cenacle*. In *Cenacle* 2 May 1995 he published "Connecticut Mountain Poems," reprinting in *The Cenacle* a collection of poems originally



published as a chapbook. In poems such as "In Early May" ("I too/ am wild and ready./ I too:/ Hiker—/ Seeker."), "Climbing" ("We sometimes are the love we seek"), and "The Ship of Love" ("The third eye opens in the sky/ I view the earth from moon's new height"), the climber's quest for the peak is equated with the soul's passage through existence, ascent into the brighter light of greater knowledge. In "Climbing" Heitner writes that "Art is Spirit in search of itself." Heitner's poetic music is filled with strong mountain breezes, clear-eyed laughing stuff, written by a strong rock-chafed hand.

Virginia Bergeron, an artist who has shown her work in shows & galleries in central Connecticut, contributed artwork for seven of the first eight *Cenacle* covers as well as much art within the magazine's pages. I especially liked her renderings of trees; they are the result of hours of contemplation over each stroke made upon the page. Trying to reproduce her work on a desktop photocopier was a difficult task; often the finer details of the pictures were lost. Computers equipped with scanners & graphics programs such as Photoshop are much more able to handle such artwork.

From the beginning, *The Cenacle* strove to feature as many kinds of art as possible. Fiction was very important among these. In *Cenacles* #1, 2, 3, & 6 Mark Shorette's "Dwelling in a Land That is Waste" ran serially. Set in present-day Canaan & Hartford, it tells the story of a judge & his daughter both of whom are confronting soul-writhing crises in their lives. Shorette's writing heats up to a epiphonic blaze at times, & confronts the very nature of reality, ecstatic, woeful:

Somewhere along the way, the journey was lost. No more concept
exists of the pilgrimage, the hegira, the exodus. At Mecca, Jerusalem, and
Qum, the pilgrims arrive washed, clean-robed or suited, no mules, oxen, or
camels to be fed or watered, no oases to be sought to clean a week of grime
off the body, and to sate the thirst. There is no price.

Perhaps because our roads are marked, we no long seek signs.

In his story there is anger, softness, violence, dreams, satire, revelation.

Mark Bergeron contributed much poetry, fiction, & prose to early issues of *The Cenacle*. His writing is by turns mystical, comical, & thoughtful. In *Cenacle* #1's poem "What This Room Means" he writes:

Do you fear the exit?
Do you fear to come in?
Is there a place to go
where the madness is gone?

His themes often concern saner, gone times, days slower & more conducive to the lingering armchair dialogue—as in this passage from "Those Were the Days, My Friend":

I had a conversation last week here with a fellow who maintained that this young fellow T.S. Eliot is the begin-all and end-all in literature these days. Well, I've read "Ash Wednesday" and while I agree that this young man is a gifted fellow, well-read, my heart is reserved for other favorites.

This love of the refined & literary past was put to its most creative use in Bergeron's "Graham Wilkins: A Remembrance" in *Cenacle* #6:

The subject of this paper is the eighteenth-satire of Graham Wilkins. Born in Northumberland in 1721 of nonconformist parents, Wilkins's work was heralded as the excellence of style in the days of Oliver Goldsmith and fell into obscurity toward the end of the Victorian era. Wilkins's novel, *House of Suffolk*, written in 1763, may have influenced Washington Irving's sanguine treatment of English rural life in his *Bracebridge Hall*.

Wilkins is a fake, a product of Bergeron's bemused imagination. Written in the form of a straightforward literary essay, this piece is a delightful ruse.

The Cenacle has been from its inception a magazine which contains a lot of my own writing. The issues over time have been composed of one-third to two-thirds my work.

From 1981 to 1998 I wrote the dozens of novellas, short stories, & scraps that taken together comprise my novel *Cement Park*. From *Cenacle* 1 onward I published the later years of these stories, beginning with the 1994 novella "Beauty, Obscura [a new fiction]" which ran 5 issues & concluded in *Cenacle* 7 November 1995. *Cement Park* is set in present day Hartford & tells the stories of a rock musician named Richard James Americus, his daughter the artist Rebecca Dorothy Americus, his rock band Noisy Children, & his bar & restaurant called Luna T's Cafe. The following from the opening pages of "Beauty, Obscura":

A great deal of what drives me in life is the Mystery I perceive at the heart of it. pursuit of that mystery, apparent discoveries o/hints along the way, detours tragic for their abrupt ends, valuable for their plaintive warnings of what to expect, this all is what keep me sitting in joints w/black pens + white paper, keeps me believing in the value of truthgroping sessions that are the drinking times w/my mates, keeps me ever after the newest manifestation of my eternal She, keeps me convinced that it is not when you have achieved carnal knowledge of her that you know anything, but it is this precise

moment that you must acknowledge flailing joyful ignorance of the Beauty before you.

Cement Park & *The Cenacle* are quite literally part of the same life-long project. Nothing else in the magazine sets forth so plainly my views on Art & right conduct.

Another series of my stories in *The Cenacle* concerns the life & times of a man named Nat Perfect who lives in present-day Boston. He's in his 40s, wheelchair-bound (for ambiguous reasons), runs a small newsstand in the Financial District, is romantically involved with a woman named Kathleen Juliet Ripley. A snapshot of his character:

Lift a single, precious consciousness from the invisible film that covers all creation. Just one is enough, much beyond enough. A crippled man, he, tho in a way not as apparent as some may think. Some gentleness resides yet in him. Love? Sure. Much of it. But he's the stream not ready to drink, not yet of purged of its poison. That time may finally come. Everyday that he drops his body w/a grunt into that old wheelchair is another perhaps drawing him closer to his first purestream day in a long time: Listen! Can you hear his waters purifying themselves? Listen!

I enjoy writing his stories & many people like them, even prefer them to the wilder-eyed much more experimental Cement Park fixtions.

My most significant poetic contribution to the early *Cenacles* was contained in *Cenacle* #4-5 Summer 1995. I travelled across the country, by bus, by train, looking for poets & artists everywhere with whom I might connect myself & my people. I had some luck, my eyes wider-than-wide at all I saw, & ended up with a 100-poem sequence called *Stranger America*. *Cenacle* #4-5 contained all the poems, about half as many photos, & many telling shards of the places I'd been & what I'd seen:

the night has surrounded me
on many paws and feet
on many towns, on the high plains
showing flat, luscious tummies
singing three-chord cosmic music
urging, pulling, loving memories
i'm still a star in Nebraska's skies
i'm still a lonely drink on Division Street
i'm still an observer of Pacific's bathing nudes
i'm still clung to Renoir's waves

i'm still a secret lick of soft thighs
i'm still a shack in Utah's storm
i'm still a hippie bound for home
i'm still a sunrise 30,000 feet high
i'm still a sentiment, tripping lyrical
"reservoir of love
reservoir of love"
i'm still a Stranger in America.

("Stranger America," #100)

Toward the end of 1995, *The Cenacle* had fallen further & further behind in its planned publishing schedule. I just couldn't keep up. The intended *Cenacle* 9 December 1995 became *Cenacle* 9-10 Winter 1996. So much accomplished that first year yet by its end I was burnt-out. 1996 was a rough year, nearly the end many times. Yet I clung to the bottom rung of hope for unseeable better days ahead.



To be continued in Cenacle 49, October 2001

Poetry: Ric Amante

Poppy

California poppy —
involuntary whorl
of orange mayhem
rolled tight at midnight
opened wide in sunlight
slender, swaying cup
spilling gold on green
haven for bees and seekers
holding on random and lusty
to abandoned hillsides
billowing silk and fire
shyly but surely ripping
your eyes from your mind
proclaiming a life
more vivid than mad.

Forsythia

Life lies perched
in the low yellow fire of forsythia
catching us unaware and timebound
eyes locked to the curb
heart leaking regret, dolor,
or any old poison
this long passage dutifully extracts—
until we too begin to know
to scrape cold ground
with a tentative, bold efflorescence
after winter's long crush
of darkness and snow
weighs down all our limbs.
A chilling and dour burden
then burst of resurrection
that yields delicate yellow flowers
delicate yellow thoughts
on a sudden spring morning
just when you felt
you had had enough and were willing
to be done with amazement.

Flowers

Did she tell you
of the flowers?
Of the deep cup of tulip,
the long perfume of lilac,
the daffodil's frilled okay?
Of a sudden she was drunk and rapt
and shaping her words to quirky ends.
"The southern hills are capped
with immediacy and blossom,
with design and delight,
hanging close to the earth
yet closer to heaven.
Blooms waltz without moving
in the slow palace of air
like watercolors of children.
Azaleas such lusty chorales,
tongues aflame in the iris,
love in the flowers
upturning our world."

Sardines

Five fresh sardines
splayed in a stainless steel sink,
and there's Picasso and Braque
and a fisherman's tan hands
pulling lines taut and vital,
gun-metal scales glinting hard and edgy
against slats of sea-green light.
Once a dazzle in the hip and heave of ocean wave
now unmoving, eyeballs glassy,
a cord of black blood twisting down from the mouth
With sharp knife and reverence
I lay open the bellies
of these small, quick fish,
run a cold stream of tap water
upon their sleek insides,
pat dry then season
their vivid blue beauty.
Half a lemon on the cutting board
red wine in a glass
life is painterly death is painterly
late-afternoon sun rests obliquely
on these sardines ready to go.

The Fly

A dead fly lies motionless in the stairwell,
a dead fly wrested from its buzzing black cohorts
who have been troubling the windowpanes all winter
in this attic room I inhabit
tenuous and determined as any frail creature
seeking purpose and release
on a brilliant April morning
when splinters of spring light
arouse a world hellbent to glow and grow
beyond its dustbound corners.
I honor and learn from this blue-green corpse
and would build a pyre of matchsticks
to send it off proper
had I smaller hands and purple airs.
Yet to note its freshest flight
from egg to wing to silence,
to remember I too will soon lie
inert and crumpled
as the fly no longer fly
I no longer I
continue to knock against other openings.
Dead to one world,
alive to another —
I'll let such a pleasurable truth
have its full and lean way with me
as I pause on the landing,
resume the ascent.

One Tree

And then you see it,
or it pulls you to its fiery arms —
a solitary oak
deep with age and passion.
And you feel a shift, a revival;
you just might be alive,
part of something grand and evident.
This tree,
this talisman,
this current of being
blazing within.

Essay: Ralph H. Emerson

The Lady and the Tree (L & T)

The heroine of Barbara's story "The Darkroom" in *Cenacle 45* was named *Lucia*. That's not a very common name, yet it feels right for a female character, doesn't it? L women like *Lucia* are awfully common in fiction-land. There's a classic noir movie called *Laura*. Nabokov wrote *Lolita*. The Zen and motorcycle guy wrote a novel called *Lila*. The French novelist Colette had a favorite character *Léa de Lonval*, and Marlene Dietrich's singer in *The Blue Angel* was *Lola Lola*.

These L ladies are so common that I call them "lamedic," after lamedh, the Hebrew name for the letter L. Some writers can hardly create any other kind of girl. Of six women's names used by Edgar Allan Poe as poem titles, for instance, five are more or less lamedic: *Lenore*, *Helen* (L in the middle), *Ulalume*, *Annabel Lee*, and *Eulalie*; and likewise three of four story-title heroines: *Ligeia*, *Eleonora*, and *Morella*. There's something unmistakably feminine about the letter. After I saw the movie *High Society* years ago, someone asked me how I'd liked Grace Kelly. Truth was, I was smitten by her voice: "She has beautiful L's!" And what was her character's name? Tracy *Lord*, wasn't it?

Luscious and Slinky

Not all L words begin with *l-*. Some begin with *sl-*. When you decode consonants at the beginnings of

words, you ignore *s* unless it's the only consonant there. *Sun* is an S word, but *spun* is a P word, and *slinky* is an L word. L is for lady. *Slinky* and *luscious* are definitely women's words, dainty and suggestive: *lissom*, *lovely*, *lithe*. A kindergarten alphabet chart says that L "has a nice feeling when

*These L ladies are
so common that
I call them
"lamedic," after
lamedh, the
Hebrew . . .
There's something
unmistakably
feminine about
the letter.*

we say it, and many of the words beginning with 'l' are extra nice.... 'Lace, lady, lion, lips, and laugh', all begin with this sound."¹ Lace and lips, huh? All those girly things: *lashes*, *eye-liner*, *lipstick*. Femmy *lipstick lesbians*, drag-queeny *Lypsinka*.

So many feminine luxuries are lamedic: cheek-smoothing *Oil of Olay*, *L'eggs* pantyhose, delicate *lace*, satiny *slips*, silky *lingerie*—*ooh la la!* A recent cosmetics catalogue instructs women to "be the likeness of Leggy Lingerie model *Lana* with her *Luscious Lathers* and *Lotions*...." The alliteration is perfect. Another catalogue offers beachwear "from head to toe...Whether you want cover-alls or partial coverage, we have *slide-ons* and *slip-intos*."² Well put! Women wear *slips* and *slip dresses* and *slacks*

1. A. H. Fremont, *Alphabet Flip Chart*, Buffalo, N.Y.: Kenworthy Educational Service, 1974. The italics in this quote and all the others are mine.

2. The two catalogues are from BeneFit Cosmetics in San Francisco (Holiday 2000) and The Last Best Place in Madison, WI (Spring 2001).

and adjustable *slider skirts* and sexy *slit skirts*. (“Let me slip into something more comfortable!”) And oh, the things they put on their feet! *Loafers*, *slippers*, *slip-ons*, *slides*, *loafer-slides*, and *slings* or *slingbacks*.

L’s Little Secret

There’s even a flower called a *lady’s slipper*. It looks a lot like one of Georgia O’Keeffe’s flowers, not so

Not all L words begin with l-. Some begin with sl-. When you decode consonants at the beginnings of words, you ignore s unless it’s the only consonant there.

much flowery as vaginal, so the name is a bit euphemistic. Slippers are famous as vagina symbols: think of Cinderella’s slipper, and for that matter, think about the word *slip* itself. One of Erica Jong’s characters dreams about the “heated smell of *slippery sex*” and calls her own body the “kingdom of the three *slipperies*.”³ The primary women’s slippery

is the vagina, also known as the *slit* or *slash*. L words for ‘vagina’ are awfully vulgar in English, but they’re perfectly respectable in Swedish, where the standard term is *slida*. That’s no coincidence; the typical imagery for L words is unmistakably vaginal, clustering around the two conditions of ‘wetness’ and ‘thinness’.

‘Smooth, wet’ surfaces are *slick* and *slippery*. To move across them is to *slip* and *slide*. One can do this with *sleds* and *sleighs*, or by *slithering* as snakes do. Water mixed with solids makes *sleet*, *slush*, *sludge*, *slime*, or ‘mud’, which is called *lutum* in Latin and *Schlamm* in German. (*Sl-* becomes *schl-* in German and Yiddish, and German nouns are capitalized.) ‘Wet substances’ are *liquid*. A pool of water is a *lake*, and Old English for ‘stream’ was *lacu*. Streams flow in a *line*, a *long line*; and I think that stream imagery is partly behind the L names for many linear things: cords like *lasso*, *lariat*, *leash*,

loop, *shoelace*; parts of our bodies like *eyelash*, *lock* of hair, *leg*, *limb*; and various other things like *logs*, *lanes*, *lances*, *lasers*, and even *lifetimes*.

Streams are wet and linear, and so are vaginas, whose linearity inspired the nicknames *slit* and *slash*. Notice that both of those are also words for ‘assault’: compare *slash* with *slam*, *slice*, and *slay*, and even with the figurative *slur* and *slander*. It’s as if the vagina were a wound—“her marvelous wound,” as one writer called it. Vaginas’ linearity is likewise ‘thin’: *slim*, *slight*, *slender*, *slivery*. Specifically, it is ‘groove-like’, whence these three words for ‘valley’: Old English *slæd*, Old Scandinavian *slakki*, and modern German *Schlucht*. Vaginas are also ‘narrow passageways’, just like ‘throat’, ‘alley’, and ‘chimney’, which in German are respectively *Schlund*, *Schlippe*, and *Schlot*. In Swedish, *slida* means ‘sheath’ as well as ‘vagina’. Even English has a few of these ‘narrow passages’: *sleeve*, *sluice*, and *slough* ‘the shed skin of a snake’. But enough about chimneys and snakeskins. Let us see what L words have to tell us about human beings.

Lewd and Lascivious

In the movie *Milk Money*, a pimp refers to one of his prostitutes as a “*slot machine*.” That’s kind of reductive, equating an entire woman with her vagina, but it’s no more reductive than the word *slut*, which is just one vowel away from *slot* and *slit*. There are half a dozen other *sl-* words for literally or figuratively dirty women: *slattern*, *slooze*, *sloven*, British *slag*, and a few archaic ones like *sloy*, *slammekin*, and *slubberdegullion*. Swedish has the ‘slut’ equivalents *slampa*, *slinka*, *slyna*; German has *Schlampe* and *Schlunze*; and even French comes pretty close with *salope* ‘bitch’.

You’d expect to find some comparable *sl’s* in fictional names, and there are a few, but not many. My favorite is Mrs. *Slipslop*, “a woman of frail morals” in Fielding’s novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742). During Monicagate a few years ago, the cartoon

3. *Inventing Memory*, chap. 7. The character is named *Salome Levitsky*.

Doonesbury dreamed up a presidential sex therapist Dr. Lauren Sloap.⁴ L words are just swimming in sex: *loose, lewd, lustful, lascivious, lubricious, louche, libidinous*. There are *lechers, libertines*, and *Lotharios*; there are *liaisons* and *lovers*. In the Bible one would “*lie* with” a lover; now we “*sleep* with,” “*make love* to,” or simply “*lay*” someone, and along the way we can explore variations like S&M *leather* and oral *Lewinskys*.

A riddle: I am pink, wet, and hollow, loosely covered by lips. What am I? A mouth, of course. With *lips* (Latin *labia*) and a moist tongue (*lingua*) that can *lick* (*lingere*). The mouth’s lubricant is *saliva*, which sounds like “slyva.” Replenish it with a drink: *slake* your thirst with a *slug* of something. *Lap* up water, *slobber* it, *slaver* it around. Eating and drinking is oh so sensual: suck on a *lollipop* and lick your chops. *Mmmm!* Me *like*, me *love*, dat is *luscious, de-licious!*

The Tree of Life

Our second concern in this article is the letter T. Where L’s imagery is complex and extensive, T’s is very simple, so we will run through it quickly and then get on to the really interesting business, which is seeing how the two letters contrast and interact. L is female, T is male. The essence of T is ‘verticality’. Look at the letter itself: T. In one of his *Just So Stories*, Rudyard Kipling said it looks like a man standing.⁵ If you remember the rule about ignoring *s* as a first letter, you’ll see that *stand* itself is a T word, just like *tall*, and it’s quite common for the concept ‘stand’ to be represented by T words. ‘To stand’ is *stehen* in German, *stare* in Latin, *tatsu* in Japanese, *táagayya* in Somali, and *tayô* in Filipino Tagalog. A standing person is *tall*, a person on *tiptoe* is even taller. The crown of the head is one’s *tip-top*, and the whole height of the body is *top to toe*.

The real basis of T imagery, however, is a tree. People often pick up on this unconsciously. Remember the classroom alphabet chart that called

L words “extra nice”? The same chart calls T “the ‘tall’ letter, like a ‘tall tree’.” Up, up, and away, up among the *treetops*, way out in the *tall timber*. Up they go: *stem, stalk, trunk*. Up they go: *stairs, steps, stilts, stacks, steam* from water, *towers* from the

*Where L’s
imagery is
complex and
extensive, T’s is
very simple . . .
L is female, T is
male. The
essence of T is
‘verticality’.*

earth, *stories* from a ground floor. Anything linear and rigid can have a T name—*staff, stick, stylus, stanchion*—but it’s much more characteristic for T words to represent a ‘vector’, a line with direction: *to, till, towards*. The direction can be ‘up’, as in *steep* and German *steigen* ‘to climb’, or it can be ‘outwards’, as in *travel*,

trip, trek. Just like L’s linear *line* and *lane*, T’s can be ‘roads’: *track, trail, street*. But they can also be ‘vehicles’: *traffic, trains, trolleys, tractor-trailer trucks*; or indeed anything ‘moving along’, from a rushing *stream* to a good walk: *stroll, tramp, stray, step, trespass*. Go. Just *start* and go.

Okay, says the skeptic, *start* is all about movement and stuff, but the opposite of movement is *stop*, so how come that’s a T word too? Good point. T is ‘tree’, and trees grow up up up, which so impresses us that we use T for any kind of ‘movement-in-a-direction’. But trees being trees, they are also rooted in place, so we use T for ‘immobility’ too, for ‘rootedness’ and ‘firmness’. ‘Immobile’ is *stand, stay, stationary, still*. A ‘place’ is a *stead*, like a *homestead*. To ‘refuse to move’ is to be *stubborn*. (The homesteader in *Shane* who refuses to leave his property is Joe *Starrett*.) To be ‘disinclined to move’ is to be *stodgy, staid, stagnant, a stick-in-the-mud, a stay-at-home*. To be ‘unable to move because of a problem’ is to be *stuck* or *stalled*; to be ‘unable to move because of overstimulation’ is to be *stunned, stupefied, or stoned*.

Stoned, eh? Before metal, the hardest things in the world were rocks and wood, *stones* and *trees*.

4. Oct. 14, 1998.

5. “How the Alphabet Was Made.”

When they finally made a really hard metal, they named it *steel*. And when Joe Dzhughashvili finally got to be a player in Russia, he renamed himself *Stalin*, which means ‘Man of Steel’. (They call Superman the *Man of Steel* too.) Steel is *tough*, *strong*, *sturdy*, *staunch*, *stout*, *stolid*—just what you want in a guy.

Tomcats

And what is it that makes guys guys? A hormone sometimes called *T*, known more formally as *testosterone*. “Testosterone. Say it slowly and the syllables emanate sexual muscularity like a fine-tuned Italian race car.”⁶ *T* is the male animal: *stallion*, *steer*, *stag*, *stud*. Or the animalistic male: *Tarzan*, *Mr. T*, *Ice T*. Even the decidedly un-animalistic George on *Seinfeld* wanted to be called *T-Bone*. The regular-guy hero of the sitcom *Home Improvement* is *Tim Taylor*, who hosts a cable show called *Tool Time*. (Sears riffed on that title recently by renaming its hardware department *Tool Territory*, a change it announced with a series of male-bonding TV commercials.) Of course, *tool* is also one of the nicknames of the penis, which when

erect for its sexual function is firm and vertical, rather like a tree. Germans call an erection a *Steifer*, a ‘stiffie’. The French say *tringle*, or ‘rod’. Erectile *T*’s lurk within the minds of English speakers as well. Douglas Adams and John Lloyd, who wrote a dictionary of made-up words, offer five new terms for ‘erection’. Two of them are *stebbing* and *tingewick*.⁷ They also describe a remarkably phallic plant: “It grows a single, *tough stalk* and makes its home on lawns. When it sees the lawnmower coming it lies down and *pops up again* after it has gone by.” They call this phallic plant *trispén*. These *T*’s are all over the place. What’s a really popular condom brand? *Trojans*. What’s another name for a

dildo? A *strap-on*. We also have some pretty suggestive *T* verbs: *stuff*, *stick*, *stab*, *shtupp*.

If the organ is the man, it’s perfectly obvious why the *T* name *Tom* is one of the default terms for a male: “Every *Tom*, *Dick*, and *Harry*.” Male cats are *tomcats*, male turkeys are *tom turkeys*, boyish girls are *tomboys*. Fiction-land is choked with *Toms*, often *Toms* with “bawdy *B*” surnames. Fitzgerald has *Tom Buchanan* and *Tommy Barban*. Any *T.B.* name will do, actually. Michael Chabon’s newest novel has “a hunky [male] actor named *Tracy Bacon*.” Men with *H.T.* names are often pretty randy too, like Bruce Jay Friedman’s *Harry Towns*, or the adulterous *Henry Trebell* in Granville-Barker’s play *Waste* (1906). Vita Sackville-West put both sets of initials together on page 17 of *The Edwardians* (1930), where she called two wealthy bed-hoppers *Tommy Brand* and *Harry Tremaine*.

Truth and Lies

Yang and yin. The male is *T*, a tree stretching high toward the sun. The female is *L*, wet and earthbound, horizontal like a field or a *lake*, comfortably snuggled against the *lay of the land*, *low* and *level*, at one with the moist ground. Why should those two letters represent those particular ideas? I think it’s because of the way the letters are articulated. When we pronounce the letters, the positions of our tongues happen to pantomime the ideas. To say *T*, the tongue point must go further up and forward than to say any other letter; while to say *L*, the tongue’s moist surface must flatten itself out to an unusual degree. So the very act of saying *L* evokes ‘horizontality’ and thus ‘passiveness’ and ‘femaleness’; while saying *T* suggests ‘verticality’ and thus ‘maleness’.

Language deals in archetypes. It is not politically correct, although it is interested in politics. It’s astonishingly precise, for instance, in portraying the polarities of political sentiment. One designated “*L* word” is *Love*; the other is *Liberal*. Since liberals—the *left*—are the nice guys, they are also more feminine, both perceptually and

6. *Modern Maturity*, Jan.-Feb. 2001, p. 48.

7. *The Deeper Meaning of Liff*, New York: Harmony, 1990.

statistically, than conservatives, who are more masculine. Party names follow suit. British conservatives have had the T name *Tories* for almost 300 years. Their liberal opposition is now called *Labour*; earlier it was specifically called the *Liberal* party.

Earlier still, British liberals were called Whigs; yet even back in Whig days, in 1726, Jonathan Swift somehow sniffed the L names waiting in the wings. His name for Lilliput's liberals in *Gulliver's Travels* was *Slamecksan*. Lilliputian politicians take their names "from the high and low heels of their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves."⁸ The 'low heels' or *Slamecksan* are the liberals. The 'high heels' or *Tramecksan* are "most agreeable to our ancient constitution." Even in Lilliput T's masculine 'up' contends with L's feminine 'down'; rigidity contends with malleability.

Swift was rather conservative himself, and one senses that his liberals' name *Slamecksan* was no compliment. In fact, *sl-* is such an uncomplimentary English word-onset that it was singled out for notice by J. R. Firth, the first linguist to study them. Without suspecting a single one of the connections we've discussed here, Firth bluntly summed up *sl-* as "pejorative."⁹ It certainly can be. L's 'horizontal' suggests 'beds'—sex, yes, but also *sleep* and *slumber*. Sleep too much and you're a *sluggard*, a *slugabed*, a *layabout*. 'Idle' people are *loafers*, *slackers*, *slowpokes*, *lazy*, *lolling*, *languid*, *slothful*. The supposedly idle poor live in *slums*. (Scarlett O'Hara's poor-white neighbors are the *Slatterys*.) 'Idle' furthermore suggests 'crummy' and 'dirty': *slob*, *sloppy*, *slapdash*, *slipshod*, *slangy*, *slovenly*, *schlocky*. A college newspaper urges students not to litter: "avoid the moniker of *slob*, *sluff*, *schlep*, *sleaze*, or schmuck."

'Lazy' and 'dirty' in turn suggest 'creepy': *lounge lizard*, *liar*, *sleazebag*, *slimeball*. Snakes are

creepy too, and German for 'snake' is *Schlange*.

When Milton retold the Garden of Eden tale in the ninth book of *Paradise Lost*, the snake got lots of

*There's absolutely
no question that
our ancestors
considered truth
and trust to be
tree-like virtues:
both words are
known to come
from exactly the
same Indo-
European root
as the word
tree itself.*

L's. He was "*sleek*" and "*sly*" and eventually he "*slunk*" away. Adam remembered him as "the *lurking* Enemy/That *lay* in wait." German is just as decisive as English about where L stands on the moral scale: *schlecht* is 'bad', *schlimm* is 'evil'. (Compare the 1972 Western-movie parody *Evil Roy Slade*.) And here's some synchronicity: just hours after I wrote that last sentence, I saw the movie *All About Eve*,

which is about a sweet young actress who calls herself Eve Harrington, although it turns out that her real name is Gertrude *Slushefski*, and she isn't sweet at all: she is conniving and duplicitous. *Hiss!*

Compare her viperish L-ness with the virtuous T words *truthful* and *trustworthy*. Compare President Clinton's shameful nickname *Slick Willie* with a journalist's description of John Ashcroft as "a man who *stands straight and tall*."¹⁰ Like a tree: *steady*, *stern*, *staunch*, *sterling*. There's absolutely no question that our ancestors considered *truth* and *trust* to be tree-like virtues: both words are known to come from exactly the same Indo-European root as the word *tree* itself. They are iconically masculine virtues, and it's marvelously fitting when they're applied to a conservative male like Mr. Ashcroft, but they can be applied to females as well, of course. A woman friend in a *Good Housekeeping* story is "*sturdy*, dependable, and good, someone who *sticks*

8. Part 1, chap. 4.

9. *Speech*, 1930, rpt. 1964. The subject was more recently treated in detail by the German scholar Hans Käsman in his article "Das englische Phonästhem *sl-*," *Anglia* 110 (1992): 307-46. The article analyzes and classes all the *sl-* words in English, including a few fictional names, and compares them to *s(ch)l-*

words in other Germanic languages. It does not link them to plain *l-* words or to the notions of 'vagina' or 'femininity'.

10. *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, PBS-TV, Jan. 2001. I think the journalist was Rich Hood of Missouri. Mr. Ashcroft had just been nominated to be Attorney General, and his supporters routinely praised his "integrity."

by you.”¹¹ A writer for *The New Yorker* remarked that the “succession of ‘t’s” in *Christine Todd Whitman’s* name “suggested uprightness, firmness, backbone,” and probably helped her get elected governor of New Jersey.¹²

Trollops and Losers

Yet T’s can also be thrown at women as insults, to accuse them of being unfeminine. Apparently even people who aren’t native speakers of English can sense how unflattering they are. Last year I was speaking to a young Chinese-born woman about the name *Irene*. She liked it, she said: “It isn’t *hard*, like *Tina* or *Tanya*,” names she described a moment later as too “*straightforward*.” Women aren’t supposed to be too straightforward. Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times* succinctly describes the double standard we have for no-nonsense people: “Men are *tough*, women are *harridans*.” Likewise for sexually assertive people: “he’s a *stud*, she’s a *slut*.”¹³ Or rather, he’s a *stud*, she’s a *strumpet*. Sexual T’s that flatter men turn against women. There’s a whole string of comparable terms: *trollop*, *trull*, *tramp*, *tart*, *tease*, *temptress*, *trophy wife*, *starlet*, *stripper*, *streetwalker*. And look at their shoes: nice girls wear *slingbacks*, but these chicks wear *strappy sandals* and *stilettos*. Va va voom!

The worst thing you can call a woman is a man; the worst thing you can call a man is a woman. Dykes are *tough*; queers are *limp-wristed*. In the Army if you’re tough, they call you a *stud*; if you can’t keep up, you’re a *slug*. Remember my term “lamedic” for L-ful women’s names like *Lulu*? Well, in fiction, lamedic women can be good, bad, or neutral, but lamedic men almost always have something wrong with them. Occasionally they are evil: Superman has a nice girlfriend *Lois Lane* and a nasty enemy *Lex Luthor*. More typically, though, lamedic men are just weak or stupid. In the pilot

episode of *That’s Life*, for example, a pleasant Jersey girl named *Lydia DeLucca* dumped her old squeeze *Lou* and went back to college. The show’s review in *The Hartford Courant* called Lou her “lug of a boyfriend.” *The Times’s* Julie Salamon called him “a *lumpish local*.”¹⁴ Compare the “losers or *lunkheads*” that Joel Coen likes to feature in his movies.¹⁵

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they are.

Luckless guys—*louts*,
lightweights, *schlemiels*,
schlemazels, *schlumps*.

Arthur Miller’s

Willie Loman is a perfect
L man. David Mamet’s
play *Glengarry Glen
Ross* has a Loman-like
character named Shelly
Levene, another failed
salesman. Ward Just
created a failed
newspaperman *Lowell
Limpett*. Heathcliff’s
unloved rival in

Wuthering Heights is Mr.

Linton. Herman Wouk’s *Winds of War* frankly
introduces diplomat *Leslie Slote* as “a coward.”¹⁶
The most lamedic male I’ve ever seen in fiction is
“*Leper*” *Lepellier*, the hapless boarding-school boy
in *A Separate Peace*—“*little lily-liver Lepellier*.”¹⁷

Just Like Home in Jakarta

Before we go on to see how T and L mix, let me
very briefly review what they mean separately, and
show you, as I do, just how universal their
underlying ideas probably are. In English, the
vaginal L is literally ‘flat’ and ‘wet’. Figuratively
these become “sleepy” and “slippery,” or ‘lazy’ and
‘immoral’. Not every language has L words that
parallel these ideas, but many do. In Somali,¹⁸ for
example, ‘drowsy’ is *lúlo*, ‘to lubricate’ is almost

11. June 1998, p. 203.

12. July 28, 1997, p. 24.

13. In her columns of May 3, 1998, and Feb. 1, 1998.

14. Both reviews Sep. 30, 2000.

15. Quoted by Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*,
Nov. 5, 2000.

16. Chap. 13.

17. Chap. 4.

18. R. C. Abraham, *Somali-English Dictionary*, London:
Univ. of London Press, 1964.

like an English *sl-* word, *saliidáynayya* (from *sáliid* ‘oil’), and ‘vagina’ is *sìil*. Switching languages, Indonesian *sela* is ‘crack, gap’, *selat* is ‘passageway’, *selangkang* is ‘groin’, *selisip* is ‘to slip in’, and *lonte* is ‘prostitute’. Also in Indonesian (which isn’t related to either Somali or English), *selut* is ‘mud’, *selusur* is ‘to slide’, *lincir* is both ‘to slide’ and ‘smooth’, and *selingkuh* is ‘dishonest’. *Lambat* is ‘slow’, *luntang* is ‘to loaf’, and *lalai* is ‘lazy, negligent’.

In English, the tree-like T is literally ‘erect, vertical’ and figuratively ‘dependable, honest’. Well, Indonesian *tegak* is ‘erect, upright, standing’, *tumbuh* is ‘to grow, to arise’, *tinggi* is ‘tall’, *tegar* is ‘stiff, stubborn’, *tegas* is ‘firm, resolute’, and *teguh* is ‘dependable’. T’s ‘phallicness’ also shows up in a number of Indonesian words, like *tombak* ‘spear’, *tempuh* ‘to penetrate, to go through’, and indeed *tukai* ‘vagina’.

Constructed Ladies

I’ve had a lot to say about T and L’s sexiness. It’s certainly present, and after I’d collected examples for a while, it no longer surprised me that Jacqueline Susann’s novel *The Love Machine* would be about a guy named Robin Stone, or that the most promiscuous sister in *The Virgin Suicides* was Lux Lisbon. Yet as we use them, the two letters are less about sex itself than about men and women, and what we expect of men and women.

We especially expect women to sound feminine, and one way of getting them to sound feminine is to give them lamedic names. Oddly enough, though, real women with lamedic names are rather rare. A recent study of twentieth-century American baby names scoured Social Security records to find the top ten names for each sex in each decade. Of the hundred girls’ names, only six are lamedic: *Linda* appears in three decades, *Lisa* in two, and *Lori* in one, all between 1940 and 1980.¹⁹

Most lamedic women are not real women at all, but rather made-up icons of femininity. The actress

The most completely lamedic names have no consonants except L, every other letter being a vowel: Ally McBeal, Princess Leia, Dietrich’s Lola, Pirsig’s Lila.

Williams became the beloved actress Myrna Loy, and the following are all stage names as well: Peggy Lee, Michelle Lee, Vivien Leigh, and Janet Leigh.

Pairing Off

Here’s another made-up Lee: W. D. Wetherell’s new novel *Morning* reunites its hero with “the beautiful Lee Palmer, his childhood sweetheart.” The quote is from a review in *The New York Times*.²⁰ I’ve been checking character names in *The Times*’s book and entertainment reviews for about three years. When I first started, I was already used to lamedic women—at least a quarter of all works reviewed seem to have them—but it did surprise me how many of these L women were paired with T men. In Pat Barker’s *Border Crossing*, for example, “Tom, a child psychologist and the protagonist of the book, walks with Lauren, his wife, along the Tyne foreshore.”²¹ In an Auchincloss story, *Titus Truesdale* is married to Lally. The novel *City of Light* features friends Louisa Barrett and Tom Sinclair. Albert Brooks’s movie *The Muse* has husband and wife Stephen and Laura. The man and woman in *The Hindenburg Crashes Nightly* are Tom and Lindsey.

Of course, *The Times* isn’t the only place to find

Constance Ockleman became an icon when she was renamed Veronica Lake. Sophia Scicolone became an icon as Sophia Loren. The most completely lamedic names have no consonants except L, every other letter being a vowel: Ally McBeal, Princess Leia, Dietrich’s Lola Lola, Pirsig’s Lila. Fiction is also full of Leilas and even fullers of Lilys, from Lily Bart in Wharton’s *House of Mirth* to Lily Manning on *Once and Again*. Montana girl Myrna

19. *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2000*, pp. 705-06.

20. Apr. 27, 2001.

21. *The New York Times Book Review*, Mar. 18, 2001.

such couples. Disney has its doggie romance *Lady and the Tramp*. In the Bogart-Bacall movie *To Have and Have Not*, he's *Harry* and she's *Marie*, but he calls her *Slim* and she calls him *Steve*. I have also known at least four such couples in real life: *Steve & Lisa*, *Tom & Lauren*, *Tom & Lorna*, *Stan & Lois*. It's as if their names had drawn them together to write a story.

A lot of stories have never really left the Garden of Eden, the familiar setting where Satan appeared as a snake in a tree to give men and women their self-awareness. In T's and L's we have our Adams and Eves; now we need some snakes. In non-snake form, Satan is sometimes known by the C name *Old (S)cratch*, and a good many story villains have C or

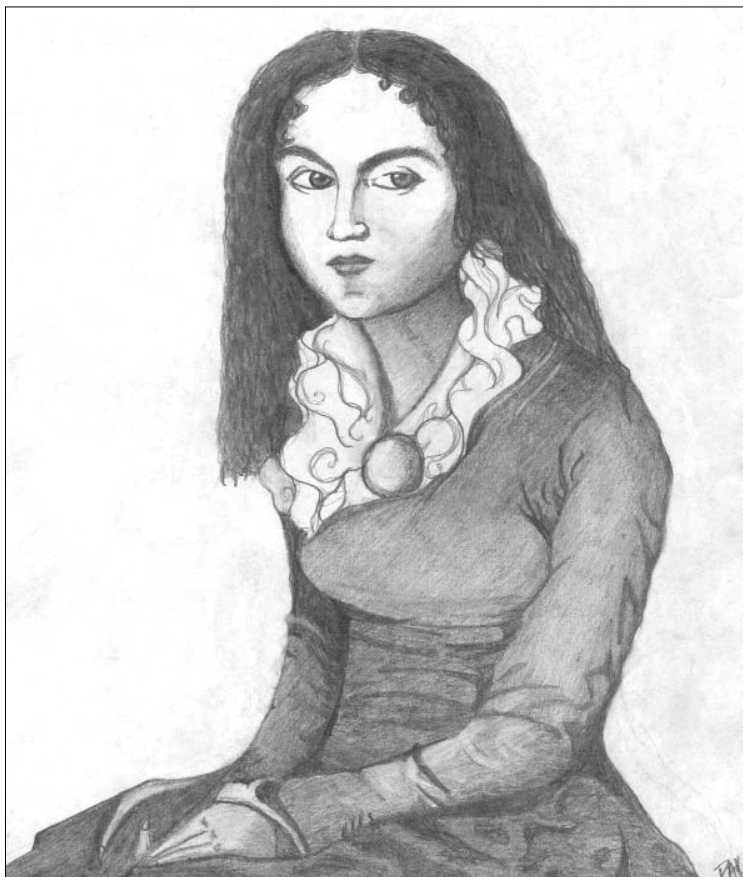
G names too. In Michael Frayn's novel *Headlong*, for example, a couple named *Tony* and *Laura* are at odds with *Martin Clay*, a would-be art dealer who is trying to fleece them. In a TV movie called *Something to Sing About*, a young black man named *Tom* wins the love of *Lily* while outwitting the local drug dealer *Creedo*.²² In a tiny short story by John Tierney, another *Tom* and *Lily* are almost tempted into extravagant debt by one *Abby Green*.²³

Just like people, the letters of the alphabet have personalities and roles and reputations. Their qualities are qualities that exist within us, and we created our languages to give them voices. Voices they have now, and they greet us every day. ❖

22. CBS-TV, Jun. 10, 2000. The movie was produced by the Billy Graham Foundation, a Christian organization.

23. "A Case of Island Madness," *The New York Times Magazine*, Jun. 7, 1998.

Constanze, wife of Mozart
Patty Kisluk
pencil



Poetry: Ray Soulard, Jr.

36 Nocturnes
[fourth series]

i.

Early morning amorous birds poke
the wet spring air.

Dogs bark toward each other for reassurance.

* * *

ii.

Blossoms etched among tree-branches &
unnameable constellations—

Spring like the tide's playful skirt,
approaching, receding, arriving this
year like every in many ways unnoticed.

* * *

iii.

Is it the wind forlorn tonight
or something else?
Some call it spring.
Some call it April.

The flakes fell awhile on tree & road.
Things still kept rising & withering.
Some saw disturbance, anomaly.
The weeds, robbers, rebels, benign, knew better.

Longing for a touch, but only books on hand,
led me to a buzz,
to a buzz, & thoughts of you.

Thoughts of you, & care for all,
& thus greater care for the night.

News of a different kind, signal best caught
when avoiding eyes tell nothing true,
when the need for touch sucks hungry on the wind.

Thoughts of you while sitting wildly in my trainseat,
news I now have for you to be told another time,
ecstasy like a lonely dog's morning call to a friend,
wisdom & bliss of no daylight use, but I think I'll dream
better tonight.

* * *

iv. *The Fens, Boston, MA.*

Marshgrass taller than a soldier,
taller than a summer's afternoon,
& geese blare from wet shadows,
the trees still bare, not summer yet,
barely spring, snow a few days back—

nature tells everything sooner or later—

The figures in the darkness scare me,
do not return my hello, & later in the
streetlamps even worse, I see their
blankness pass by my blankness—

but tonight I offered more—

we make Art because we have forgotten
how to tell the truth.

There was no sudden blade, the threat
never embodied. Or the threat I carried
with me all the while. My blankness. Your blankness.

* * *

v. (*for Leni*)

Love the aching puzzle, maybe the
supreme endless rule, a stream of
flicking diamonds, a ceaseless smoke,
a flu—

A puff of buzzing, the bumblebee awaits
me each day, to tremble my fears,
to remind me, as I retreat, of this
life's beginning in a watery sack of dreams—

Of reality's floorless foundation, of music's
invisible creating hand, of my beloved's
faraway nights of slow shuddering change,
of this life's stop in a buried gourd of bones—

I speak to you now, my beloved,
across miles of unconfessed wounds
atop years of pretty sister & smiling
parents:

Love the aching mystery crackles in the
veins, love the supreme noise rhythms
deeper the heart, love the pool of flicking
maybes, love the curing smoke, love the birthing pyre.

* * *

vi.

Moons & blooms & the windy wild
on a festive night—
the spring crackling with sap—

this electrical universe with its
weightless mysteries, depthless
puzzles, heightless frivolities—

I love all from the one heart which
bears me though I do not own—
one heart to love, one heart to honor,

one heart to serve, & one to abide
my pain & yours, to carry what
seems impossible, to weep more often

with the years, & thus keep slick &
moving, tonight, all which is pouring
into this moment, all which this moment

is releasing, heed the siren & the bullet
but press hands with that which is
vulnerable, notice patterns in the blooms

no accountable hand did wrought, when
matters of despair & direction
plague the day heed the softness

which insists & stays, note the bark
& the chirp which greet the day
fair or foul, the moon its constant

clear pronouncement, peer back into
dreams, their heart-swifiting terrors
& gauzy ecstasies alike—

cry out, even softly, til something,
somewhere, responds.

* * *

vii.

The white shells of spring lie upon the grass,
she watches them closely, curious blue eyes,
I remark the spirits around us, she nods,

the shells are damp, the day's breath still
dewy, like this girl, potent things not quite
awake, dismayed & reassured by daylight & dream

alike. The white shells lie near an old stone
marker, his name was Obadiah, been here
nearly 300 years, she nods as I explain this

white rose was gift to me from a kind-faced
man, a token of appreciation from his chessboard
to my courtyard table leafed in pens. She curls

into my lap, trusting, smiling, wanting, but
also at peace. The trees above still fringed
with stars. Her hand strokes the white shells

til she sleeps. In her dream I come to her
not as a man but as a white rose, then a
white moon. Then a stilled reflection. Then a healing heart.

* * *

viii.

Spring blossoms, happiness, drift near,
nearer, & away, & some watch
steadily for carwrecks & ruined thighs—

This chalice of night offers, ecstasy,
offers more, for survivors of
daylight's drooling buzz, its shift

promises, sign this, but in here please.
A bed. A breast. Bread. A box for
that embarrassment at the end.

Don't say no. Don't align with the night.
No binding pledges tattooed on cock
or clit. None. Just freedom. What the

barks & birdsong are all about. Music
for your wounds. A wise hand too.
Perhaps not. Spring blossoms, happiness,

near, nearer, & away. Did you ever
believe in these things? News of kings &
carwrecks, whatever. Happiness here. Still. Nearing.

* * *

ix.

We own less than the trees who
live in cradle, sunshine, & grave,
less than the birds who partner & play
with the air, less than the stars
who do not name themselves nor seek
a simple order.

A damp raven's feather drifting 'round an oak's rivened trunk.

A brittley starfall cascades a predawn snowdrift.
The rap-rap of icicles melting from a roof.

The art which eludes the clutching man.
The truth which eludes the clutching race.

Wordless emerge from the watery sack of dreams.
Wrapped with tears within the buried gourd of bones.
Droning cries in between for response. Someone. Anything.

Greatest mine in release, orgasm without
tag, reaching touch without
pulling grasp, the flood of healing light
into the life newly unknown,
the way music now stirs the feathers within,
& one's smile, now free, uncurls for miles & miles & days.

* * *

x. *All glory passeth*

The power raised, tonight, the mortal tyrant
within crushed, the eye roams over
pink cheeks, over any slip of flesh
revealed, the smoke of a smile, the blind
of a finger, the thrill of the power raised,

watching that which twitches & dances to
the power strummed, the tumult
in power stroked through oil, canvas
her body as she awaits her costume
tonight, her pleasure to conduit power

wildly, a split mattress, a splintered bush,
a fucked taboo, fuck me harder,
approach the trees themselves for
notice see if this power raised
is rain or shine or breeze or more

mewing from a race unfit to bear
its dreams, a few of them architects,
a handful musicians but shred so
easily by the power they raise a thousand
for one to briefly stroke—

But again tonight the power is raised,
the bastards about give way, nature
will tell everything if we cease to ask,
cease to ignore, the trees are ready,
the kittens, piranhas, typhoons, all ready,

power raised, again, tonight, no answers,
no puzzles, cherry blossoms, no walls,
spit in your hands & be ready to clobber
cosmos or facemask, the blood to equal,
to better one's dreams, to follow the lick

steadily from breast to belly, bush to back,
to give over to her tongue or his
tongue or their several touches, to release
to the deeper danger which hardly murmurs
at dusk—

fuck him fuck her fuck them when
the moon roars up from the horizon,
begin with tears, begin with flail,
the power is raised, the trees won't
notice the grind but for the sparks—

The trees know we call it love,
that we have a thousand languages
to shroud & queen just one word,
the sky is smacked with our love
frenzies & loss, the birds approach us,

instruct us to wait, to listen, to learn
how to give, how to receive, how identity
merges within the flock & coalesces
into the egg, dogs won't abandon
us, remembering love still—

the power raised perhaps even a
notice tonight by this electrical
universe, love the aching puzzle, no
puzzles, no questions, love a steam
of flicking diamonds, an endless smoke,

a flu, love the pool of flitful maybes,
love the curing smoke, love the birthing
pyre, love restraint, confusion, liberty,
the power raised tonight while all
awaits us—

Your blue eyes far tonight, as the trees
await, as I'm told ascend but do not yet,
something remains here, in the strews & the
beams, something remains, no puzzles, no
answers, neither tattered nor invincible—

Something remains, some string of notes
blue-eyed & blonde, something to
explain the gleam & the pitch, something
the trees & sky & dimensions many will
allow me, something important, a steam, a

smoke, a flu, the power raised,
tonight, the power stroked, the power
strummed, the mortal tyrant within again
crushed, no answers, no puzzles, &
my eventual swoop into you, & a greater music, & a greater
silence.

* * *

xi. *For Leni, with hope*

Several days ago, on gleaming sands, you'd
lain, a numb frosting of heat, an idle
smiling mind, a book of beauty, a palm
of green, a rag of poems from a friend.

A child again, winged, jeweled,
smirked with hope.

Leaving this feeling called home, you
returned toward the unloved place filled
with your dresses, keys, & candles, still hearing
the ocean's creamy buzzing. Skin still murmuring with
freedom.

A child's shadow again, turbulence, vodka,
the amnesia of a wide plastic seat.

You now hold a dazed pigeon in your hands,
wings able, mind crooked, a mending
you'll see to, a process you know, despair
the within preacher of a tattered world.

The child & her shadow beset with unbeaten urge
to warm & be warmed, release, near the hidden gold.

Creature will care for creature tonight,
healing begins as confession of need,
heats mingle, fingers stroke feathers,
each raising the where, how, & why of home.

* * *

xii.

My blankness. Your blankness. The
company of men & women a cacophony
of arguments, how to live, how to live,

how to live, & why. Life a beautiful fizz
between this blankness & that
blankness. A lick. A taste. A squeal.

No more. Perhaps again life an endless
stroke along arousing veins & flesh,
a set of she-lips opening wider & wider

because the need to be taken understood
as the need to be shared. Our beat
our blood our cum in my mouth as I

kiss you & you taste me tasting you.
Life maybe a scripture to be
puzzled, what figure sums two pine & a shell?

A finger dabbed in red runs her lips
to lips, paints nether & further
she wants to bite it, she wants it

to continue, yes a scripture, sins &
footnotes equated with starlight
& fancy. The animals are merely our

rides. Dinner. Fun. Or a war. Principles
aligned with cannons. So many babies
& square feet per victory. My blankness.

Your blankness. The crooked chimes
& the stray pigeons' nest on the old
porch with shattered windows.

Something to puff slow. Mellow slow, man.
Count the beats. Muse on the blood.
It's all good. Let it flow.

Hunger but always beautifully.
Puppies to feed. Find the drums.
Slackass cosmic mysticism. Grow the

bud & smile. Or power. Moonlight.
Orgasm. Water. Blood & land.
Art more fierce than any other

thought. Art the thought of Godd
& the thought of no-Godd. Art
til she trembles, til she stills, til

she understands "just fucking pose" as all
the scripture & governance she will
ever need. Til she understands that

the reward is reciprocation. Symbiosis.
Worship it but do not touch until you
understand. It is yours. Ours. Say it.

Til she understands nude play in green
fields is worship. Til she remembers.
Art not the object it appears. Art

the release. Art the pyre. Art
the last drop never quite swallowed.
Art the hardest nipple. Art the

brave book of blank pages. Wear this.
Just fucking pose. My blankness.
Your blankness. Wear this too.

Just fucking pose. My turn next.
Our turn last. How to live, how to
live. How to live & why.

Her hair red in every dream I've ever
had. Blue eyes of flaming stone.
Knows how to pose. Knows what she tastes

like to me. Knows. Every poem a poke
in her pretty. Wants it rougher.
Always wants it rougher. Make me

cry & I will stay. My blankness. Your
blankness. Make me beg. Make me
fizzle. Scratch my fur. Raw my leaves.

Claw my starlight. Listen to the
music that trickles out. Blankness.
Blankness. Mark me with your

nonsense, your artist's need to name
& know. You'll never get deep enough.
You will never get the last drop.

* * *

xiii.

Unto the master who makes butterflies
from fire, his blue eyes of flaring
stone urge leap the gap!

"Become the gap! Let the power atwist
thine hands leap thee!"

One emerges. A trembly dream. Now two,
neither confirming the other. Then
six, breaching the mind's moats.

"Let it go! Let it all go!" he cries,
flicking them out like a heavy cloud its wet prize.

Butterflies from flame fill the sky,
bidding me come, let it go, bring
nothing, especially her. Nothing.

"You've become dark & dry!" the master
shouts. "Deformed! Unable to love!"

Butterflies of every color, coaxing, urging
me. The beginning of a new freedom.
Shed sinews & blue fancies.

"This universe piss! Blight! A shill
by stars! Hustling flatulence!"

Tick-ticking of the day. Beat-beating
of the night. Dogs bark madly as
my fingers rise up.

I look back at her where she waits.
She nods. She smiles. She turns away.

The master is gone, his butterflies
now dawn. Beat. Tick. Beat. Tick.
She remains. My music. My choice.

* * *

xiv. *For Leni, Nine Months Known*

I looked back at her where she waited,
the midnight a mulling blue, furred fingers
of cloud, weeds & leaves still tapping

from a rain. She nodded. She smiled.
We knew each other already in dreams
& silence. A beat. A beat. Now three.

She turned away. Still, thoughts of her. For her
news tonight, has her healing begun?
A release, a scream, crazy blood?

Crazy blood, my love, breathing again
the coarse, clean air? Thoughts of
you, beggings of mind for your news,

for your beauty I feel like a remembered
breeze, love you enough to let go,
love you enough to hold on?

Touch me with beauty again, I'll tap you
with balance anew. Beat. Beat. A third.
Many. Love stretches tonight from readiness to regret.

* * *

xv. *Letting Go, Holding On*

A beat. A beat. Now three. Blonde music
& beating Art. The finest song raised
from love the supreme noise. Lillies

in my muse's hair, sunshine trailing her
fair clean skin. Lillies. Daisies. Kisses
& ghosts & hopes of kisses. What art thee?

My music. My choice. What art thee?
A channel. A chance. What art thee?
Chalice & change. Letting go, holding on.

A beat. A beat. Now many. Blonde music,
ragged night, beauty the supreme noise,
finest song for my muse twined of ocean

dusk & kisses & ghosts of hope. Letting go,
holding on. What art thee? The supreme
noise, crown of knowing, milk of mystery.

A beat. Again. So many. Smiling, burn
this paper flower to ash.

* * *

xvi.

I make Art because I have forgotten
how to tell the truth. Truth of a
remembered memory of a hand, feeling

what an emotion's emotion of a face is
like, how hell & sunsets are adjectivally
potent, lingual strategies, a murk shilled

as matrix, a twinge called dream, damp
hot air hustled as rain, basis for
music, the lies of any color summoned,

the words cock & cunt & fuck used
like ideas, you have no breasts
to inspire me, nothing, I'd gain more

from stripping a tree, my beloved trees,
& burning down the ancient cemetery
where I confess little to nobody,

I make Art because I have forgotten
how to tell the truth. Confessions &
damnation. Meaning culled from lifeless bones.

* * *

xvii.

I don't believe in the god.
I don't believe in the goddess.

There is no truth that does not give
way to another, no love with neither
beginning nor end, no pain that reigns
& then diminishes, no gesture of an open
hand that, once offered, can be retrieved.

* * *

xviii.

Only that which is lost will never
truly leave.

Scars of smiles. Armies of fantasies
of brown days atwist with she-bitch
or he-bitch or they-bitch.

Bones of groans. The secret to know,
young sparkling artists many, is
that the uglier music feels truer,

thighs are meant to be throttled, minds
to be straightened. Hearts do not heal.

* * *

xix.

To play one true note is to become
slave. Seeking the next. Hustling
the twilling birds & the midnight skies.

Believe it lurking in a pair of pink
panties, in the silent desert,
somewhere in a crowd of swaying faces.

Ever after the pursuit of the next true
note, in a voice shiny with bracelets
& starlight, in a hand seen as a

language. Breasts confused, minds ransacked,
dreams haughty & irregular, to play
one true note is bondage. Nothing but

the flames are godds thereafter, nothing
but orgasm & death worthwhile news.
The tongue sliding down throat to breast

to belly to bush to buttocks to back
ceases if her breathing proves not
tuneful, if clouds shroud starlight

over the hill, if she or the cosmos itself seem
too or too little willing.

* * *

xx.

Tonight I let you go. I must
walk on. Our blossom was of but
a season. It will not survive the
heat. It was a thing of frost, a single
secret evanescenced with the sun's tendings:

This summer you will finally hunger
anew. Call it my gift. Now I must
have sense enough to let you go. Walk on.
Let you go, tonight, & thence scrape
& fumble for my music back.

Our blossom was sugar, now melted,
now dew—a blessing, a jaguar,
fierce, a flu. A truth, a way, a gleaming
penny in starlight. A cloud, a something, a whatever
coated with greed for love's secret brew.

* * *

xxi.

To play one true note, play it blonde,
call it you, release not to loss but
to this yearning heart tonight, my
every thought abuzz & mulling with you,
my every denial a headlight hurling
toward a brick wall—

To play one true note, to tell the truth,
along a roadside thick with listening weeds,
charms chanted in chirps, a wind
pressing, sky velvet, one true note
here, where something stays, where I return—

To play one true note, much beauty
the blossom of a season & then gone,
but blossoms contain leaves &
leaves branches & something persists
beyond dogma & formula, something
new erupts with milky glee, & again—

To play one true note & call it by
your name, neither godd nor goddess,
nor they you, nor each of these weeds
another nor the sky a wall nor the
ground a floor nor the known always true—

To play one true note, play it blonder,
eyes of blue. Hope invisible, dreams
ferocious, unhoused cats & secret skunks
return to old havens or prowl for new.
I live with spirits within bricks.
I live chased & chasing, a growl, a mew—

To play one true note, among
the weeds & the streetlamps,
the cruisers blaring by, the night
shimmies with heat. I make Art
to remember how to tell the truth.
Serve the muse. Serve the muse. Serve the muse.

Black pen dancing blindly moth wild—

* * *

xxii.

Serve the muse. Serve the muse. Each stone
of Art added to the hill. Woods shroud
the hill, branches shadow it.

Serve the muse. She receives to give. The buzz
in the wind, thoughts for a strum, colors
for a tone. Release, grow. The skies

clear, cloud, add another stone to the
hill. Serve the muse. The whole of
the universe something soft—flesh—breathing.

While the buildings elsewhere erupt &
topple, sweating hands grip what is
disintegrating, return here again & again.

The hill grows & breathes in rhythm with
the trees. Serve the muse. Come & go
& come again. Here a staying music. Shimmering
permanence.

* * *

xxiii.

Serve the muse. With fiery branch
& roaring texts. Ascend, diminish,
extinguish. Serve the muse with belly
stiff & eyes fearful flicking. Alone for
days among machines & dust. No
fingers to tap nor hearts to stroke.
Dreaming memories of canyons, of
the pummel of aliens. Spacecraft
passing over deserts for highway noise,
annihilation sprung from a hatch,
a thousand thousand alien bats, plastic,
organic, headless, savage. Serve the
muse she offers these nocturnal treats
to jar & press. A line of people bound
for the disintegration booth. A timetwisted
summons to an old wound of a war.
The world's deepest waters refuse men

yet she tips open the idea & men
figure how. Serve the muse. She is love
& restlessness. Burn the forests, build
the boats. She plucks from the flock
& births the egg. The hands & its
chalice. The clock & the moon. Serve the
muse. Serve the muse. Midst chirp &
growl, the daze of this hour, the coming
dream, the difficult instruction. New faith with the sun.

* * *

xxiv. *Confession*

What remains a holy emptiness,
persistence of your tone, your love
of unhoused kittens, Caribbean sun,
you sucked & gnawed at my words
for their secret, for you, not me,
a milky shiny secret, a memory, a thrill—

You've known none like me. I was
your first & last, your crevice of
treasure, your secret burning city
of bliss, your unplayed forest of
carnal notes, a bomb to splay &
scatter your demons & silence.

Love. Only love. We had only love.
A new milk each time, a glee,
a hunger, a touch, a pounding,
a shredding, buckling, a crushing,
breathing now in chorus, truth
of it better than a crown or a fancy—

What remains a holy emptiness,
persistence of a shared space, ten
thousand words on a rack of pages,
the mouth of whipping beast opening
a chasm between maybe & memory,
a milky regret, poison, then cure.

Today, tomorrow, to awaken, to begin,
seek new curves, whittle new notes,
figure the formula of a new she-beast,
wish you a happy, hungry lover who
will thank me for having been, & gone—
love. Only love. We have only love—

A holy emptiness. Milky nocturnes,
trickling starlight. Loveless machines
& bitter dust. Lessening til you remain
but a myth. Ten thousand words
on a rack of pages. Did you find their
secret just for you? How to let me go?

* * *

xxv.

Embrace it all. Let it go. See what
remains. Call your life's times
shadows on the walkway. A fruit fallen
& lying in the grass. No secret.
No gleam. No way. Lamplights flare on
with thickening dusk, no direction but
home, sniff for the music, begin to follow.
Summon her, your music, tho belly stiff &
eyes dreaming dust & starlight. Pick up
the fallen fruit, again. Ten thousand
songs in every bite, every chew. Fiery
branch, roaring thoughts. Milky nocturnes.

Become a new fool in service of her night.

* * *

xxvi. *Childhood*

Become a new fool in service of her
night, its rushing lights, wishing hours,
holy emptiness.
Holier music. Strums of starlight. No death.
Just become a different range of rhythms.
Higher colors. Become the word love.
Ease roots from this mortal soil, its
life-thinning mix of regret & sensation.
No hellos. No goodbyes.
Each leaf's blood weaned of grab & grief,
entropy's wailing smell. Vision rising,
colors & bells, become a new fool
in service of her night, her heating
touch remembrances willow trees &
crabapples, wagons & children, an
ancient fire a night's suicide put out.

* * *

xxvii.

Serve her, her night, beyond
trembles & tears, the flashing
passage of spasm, & mourning, serve
her with open hands, with the
danger of obsession, the greater
danger of love, service to fireballs & freaks

The danger of love mistaken
for polity, for treaties, for history,
love confused with daylight, daylight's
shackle of numbers, daylight's pressures
to breed rules, trim incantation, square off
dirt & women, love mistaken for safety

Serve her night, its wailing, no
ease, she pulses, always, all that
is, pulses. Skies clear, buildings
erupt. Break down. Burn. Build
again. Love scrambles from every
rubble. Smile aching with release.

Serve her, serve her night. No bones
nor chords. Her truth will not give
way, love neither beginning nor end.
Call her Art, dream, man, woman,
oak, song. Rap a thousand trunks in
chantless rhythm. Answers flicker out with dawn.

* * *

xxviii. *for Leni, time passing*

Our dividing to learn better to love,
burned to blankness one day, yes,
& a later one build up again, yes,
love the beauty of a season &
gone. Blossoms bloom & pass & thus
the story of the universe.

Universe, art thee grasped somewhat
as heartbeat, falling through water?
A flail, a flow, a flu? A friend
watches the hawks & gulls &
scribbles his musical sums. Another strums
& puffs, smiles & suffers, tends his striplings.

But you & I dividing, for the better,
preachers wave the flames & texts
of mitosis. Entropy & resurrection,
old joke among the raw hands.
They know we don't need gills to inhabit
this universe. Just nimble toes.

Just fingers loving the green. Are you
listening, diminishing love? Things
grow & pass for a reason. Grow, my love.
Grow green & good. I will write
& pray for you from further &

further away. My prayers beseech
this universe for your healing.

As we divide, as nights & starlight
pass by, grow green & good.

* * *

xxix. *Self-portrait, fragment*

4:20, take a hit, begin again,
sunlight spattering on curtains old
& quiet, the man watching them
just a body, head of a dog,
heart of a deer, lungs of an oak,
soul of a comet, 4:25 now, take
another hit, his girl's been missing
most of his life, hence ten thousand
cries on a rack, begin again, in danger,
in love, 4:30 & a third hit for smiles' sake—

* * *

xxx. *No direction but home*

A fruit fallen & lying in the grass,
its skin gleams finely & brokenly,
cleft from its tribe now begins its dreaming,
a hunger builds within its raging song,
a cluster of moans gives way to a single trill,
high & clear, simple as sunlight & death:

No direction but home. No direction but home.

The wider sky, the deeper magick, waning's comfort,
bluer breezes, bluer grasses, bluer tempos,
the gift of water, life's visible promise,
creatures & leaves moving slower,
the edges of the world less scribed,
more paintbrush's dream, less pencil's answer:

No direction but home. No direction but home.

Dream to rap a thousand trunks in
chantless rhythm, force stream & starshine
into a dangerous exchange of roles,
cut into the fearful arrogance of men,
whip weather with garden & arroyo,
die twice daily like this, better to eat & shit other times:

No direction but home. No direction but home.

Comfort & fire, the mystery of dust,
querying creatures, loose-boweled thoughts,
begin again, comfort & forgetting,
history dwindling to a moment, another,
begin again, sunlight & death simple
again, dreams of my seeds, shimmering:

No direction but home. No direction but home.

Night raging, a herd wild, grieving, unsure,
lost, clues everywhere, seeds everywhere,
seed & dreams & water & sunlight,
a thousand chantless rhythms now
ragged with melody, seeds preach of
the starshine & stream within, sugar & maya:

No direction but home. No direction but home.

What remains a holy emptiness, a fruit fallen
& lying in the grass, its skin gleaming
finely & brokenly, beyond cleaving & dreaming,
beyond hunger, just a song becoming
itself forever, travelling simple as sunlight & death,
no direction but home. No direction but home.

xxxi.

Completion begins in despair, emptiness,
hands loose, hurrying the empty road,
drops lead to thunder, shadows move
in the weeds, a different path, the
quietest hiss of a choice, but what place
for a man save among his own?

From despair a new dream, a bigger dream,
from emptiness no longer a dream at all,
the world is fat with miracle & woe,
dreams of my seeds, of a flash to life,
won't happen tonight, my empty bed, my hovel's
brick walls, what place in the world at all?

* * *

xxxii.

4:20 again, raise the power, fingers
twined with smoke, grown green & good,
seekers & outlaws across the land,
grow green & good, raise the power,
become seeds for some new star's
quest, but I am in my bed right now,

brothers & sisters, no puff to play, no
hands to twine, just milky nocturnes,
& a power I'm trying to raise, part
kindness, part stiff belly, wanting
to be willing, to be more than free,
to be committed in the shit &

the joy, ten thousand words on a rack,
then thousand racks, risks & rebels,
fear, all-night burns, rawness,
bravery, open hands, randy heart,
a puff for fraternity, another for
conviction, grown green & good,

seeds for some new star's quest—
like the few freak bees seeking the hive's next honey.

* * *

xxiii. *for Leni, June 2001*

To begin again, begin continuously,
raise the power, again, tonight,
summon the torches & the blades, soberly call
love by its secret name, blood, wash
each finger in oil & juice, raise the flag,
leave music sleeping midst kittens & blonde hair—

The music is quiet, passive in the clatter
of metal & wood, skulks in moonlight,
creeps into the canvas sack of oranges
& pears, remains but dawn smoke in
the heart, a secret fury for building over
battle, for the flash of seed over clashing earth—

Muse she dreams troubles & division,
dreams of empty benches & farewell
songs, muse she twists among licking
kittens, damp with obscure terrors,
muse she dreams moonlight dreaming
her, something missing. What is love?

The language tonight is that of war,
the one for tyrants, misers, keepers
of the village's caged flame, a hundred
words for mine, none for we, the
language tonight boasts spiked songs,
folklore for sheep, poetry for swine—

Muse moves naked through the chamber,
a dream-wraith, a furious beam,
preaching with each raging stride,
the only war worth engaging, love,
the only armament an honest hand
ever wielded, Art, bullets of mercy, mercy,

Mercy when she topples me from mine
own fists, beauty in her tight mouth
on mine, love a stench to solitude &
pain, love a messiah among this world's
broken churches, love stronger than you or me.

* * *

xxxiv. *for Leni, continuing*

Tonight, my love, & thus I approach
you, through the steam & scent
of lillies, the chanting buzz of wings
& waving lashes, approach you wearing
my love like a skirt of foam, my eyes
a thousand trembling leaves, my fingers
a wall of panes, a mulling murk
of dusky colors, twisting lingual things,
approach you, head of a dog, heart of
a deer, lungs of an oak, soul of a
comet, belly of milky nocturnes, ten thousand
words on a rack, shaking scripture, flailing torch.

* * *

xxxv. *A fragment, summer's empty park*

Shadows move in the weeds,
a different path, the quietest
hiss of a choice, but what place
for a man save among his own?
What place in the world at all?
What question is the key?

Sweet brown grass, talkless creamy
wind, dank starry ceiling, brick
boxes of families, TV dopers, radio whores,
sugar-tummied princesses, muscle-
flapping linebackers, stained preachers,
damp shopkeepers, lapping statesmen—

Which fence to cut? Which wall to
fell? Which dream to capture, cage,
burn ten thousand words high? Which
poison to gird with firepower? Who
next for the podium, who next for the cross?

A brown moth hustles by, a different path,
the quietest hiss of a choice—

* * *

xxxvi. *All glory passeth, continued*

A greater music, & a greater silence,
tonight finally understood as flow
not time, a symphony for strings &
winds, a mountain ballet, an old growth opera,
tonight the choice as always to play
or not the watching sheep, the feeding swine—

Stumble into the night with open hands,
discover wider sky, deeper magick,
all creation in motion, buzzing,
the blood skin & breath of the night
a festival of movement, feeding on
change, chew, swallow, mitosis,

Entropy, a fruit fallen & lying in the
grass, a bomb of sugar water, another
juice in the rhythm, flow where
the preacher sees anarchy & the
tyrant lassitude, but no waste tonight,
not a note which does not elevate or

Depress perfectly, break down, burn,
build again. Wider sky, deeper magick.
Beasts & the good green are dancemasters
again tonight, the blood hustling
music even in the weakest skeleton, body
seeking body for hard, wet commerce—

Love a messiah among the world's
broken churches, gathering like
loyal kittens especially round the
solitary beds, where a lover's lick
& whisper lacks, not a creature forgotten
tho a man or woman may think so—

But love is the birthing pyre in
bed, jungle, universe, seeking,
exposing, compelling a glory however
yes it will pass, but teaching
that it forever passes, the healing
prayer at the heart of all creation

& nature tells this & more if
the hand will but touch pink leaf
& eye but scan for hawk & swallow,
nature tells everything in the
trot of an ant, the skulk of a
possum, frosty March, twilight autumn—

Just a different way, different path
than tanks in the desert or
suits in the glass room, a path
not resistant to cycle & role,
a path unknowing of clocks & choices,
a path no man may follow without

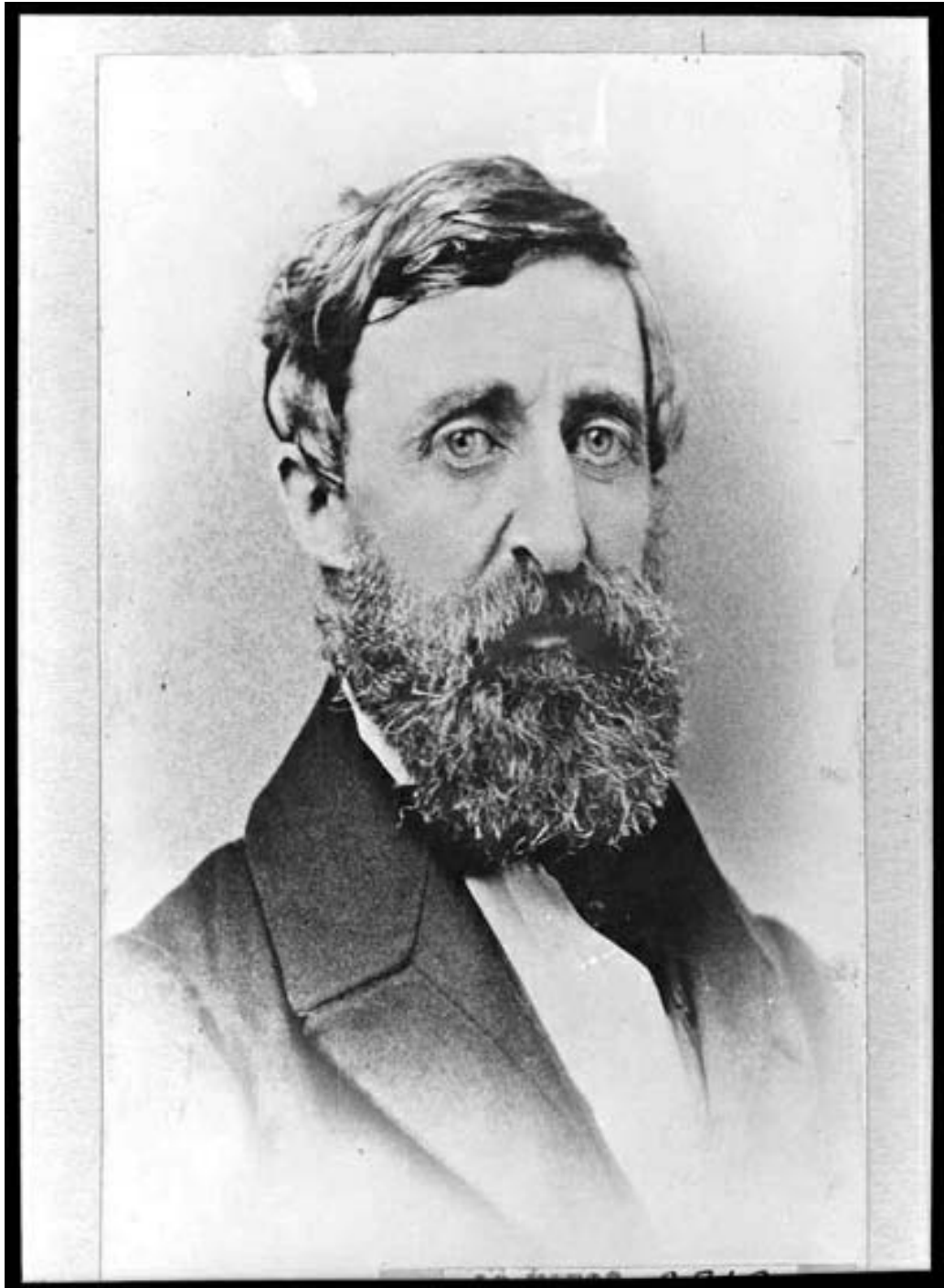
tumbling so we make Art to remember
our truth, part leashed lightning,
part beloved tree, seeking ever
the wider sky, the deeper magick,
letting flash our seeds & our rhythms,

sometimes finding a greater music,
a greater silence, a brief name
for the unknown pain awled upon
our hearts, arriving on good nights
in a rain forest, a small fire,
a mug of tea, a puff, a joke, a happy cry.



6-27-2001
Malden, MA.

Diana, Lady of the Hunt
Patty Kisluk
Ink and wash



Photograph by Geo. F. Parlow, 1879

Commentary: Mark Shorette

Henry David Thoreau: A Man of the American Counterculture

from *Civil Disobedience*:

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgement or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others—as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders—serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as the rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without intending it, as God. A very few—as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men—serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it. A wise man will only be useful as a man, and will not submit to be “clay,” and “stop a hole to keep the wind away,” but leave that office to his dust at least:

*“I am too high born to be propertied,
To be a second at control,
Or useful serving-man and instrument
To any sovereign state throughout the world.”*

I submit to you the following proposition: that Henry David Thoreau was the original man of the American counterculture. I do not suggest that he was a man who always lived up to his own ideals (he did not), nor do I suggest that anyone really could. What I do suggest is that without Thoreau's writings, the seminal ideas of the American counterculture simply

would not exist, or would exist in a stunted form that would lack his forceful and convincing prose. Without him, resisting, protesting paying his Mexican War tax, Whitman's dictum to "resist much, obey little" would have been a lone voice crying out against the repression of the times.

from **Walden:**

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. It is not important that he should mature as soon as an apple tree or an oak. Shall he turn his spring into summer? If the condition of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality which we can substitute? We will not be shipwrecked on a vain reality. Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze still at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not?

Henry David rejected the circumscribed ideas about American individualism which were prevalent in his day, and which remain prevalent in our own. Consumer culture's idea of being an individual rests on the notion that you have the choice to paint your walls eggshell white or ivory. Henry David prods us to have a life forged from our deepest identity rather than a lifestyle. To some, however cool they may seem, this will always be a threat. Conventionality in American culture runs deep, even among those who claim to reject it.

from **Life Without Principle:**

If a man walk in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer; but if he spends his whole day as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making earth bald before her time, he is esteemed an industrious and enterprising citizen. As if a town had no interest in its forests but to cut them down!

At the center of Thoreau's counterculturalism are two chief ideas: appreciation of nature for its own sake, and suspicion of commerce and what it does to humane and natural values. Go to some of the literature today of groups like Earth First!, and you will read, though not in the eloquent prose of Henry David, the same refrain: the earth is not man's "resource," the animals do not exist alone for their skins and meat, they exist for their own sakes, and are good, and have the right to be let alone, and allowed to exist.

from **Life Without Principle:**

America is said to be the arena on which the battle of freedom is to be fought; but surely it cannot be freedom in a merely political sense that is meant. Even if we grant that the American has freed himself from a political tyrant, he is still the slave of an economical and moral tyrant. Now that the republic — the res-publica—has been settled, it is time to look after the res-privata, — the private state, — to see, as the Roman senate charged its consuls, “ne quid res-PRIVATA detrimenti caperet,” that the private state receive no detriment.

In Seattle, November 1999, the battle for the res-privata was once again taken up, not only for America, but for the world. When the battles against censorship are fought, the res-privata is looked after. When anyone, anywhere, lights up a joint, in defiance of an unjust, unconstitutional, tyrannical law, the res-privata is being defended.

from **Walden:**

I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. We are for the most part more lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our chambers. A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows. The really diligent student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge College is as solitary as a dervish in the desert. The farmer can work alone in the field or the woods all day, hoeing or chopping, and not feel lonesome, because he is

employed; but when he comes home at night he cannot sit down in a room alone, at the mercy of his thoughts, but must be where he can "see the folks," and recreate, and as he thinks remunerate himself for his day's solitude; and hence he wonders how the student can sit alone in the house all night and most of the day without ennui and "the blues"; but he does not realize that the student, though in the house, is still at work in his field, and chopping in his woods, as the farmer in his, and in turn seeks the same recreation and society that the latter does, though it may be a more condensed form of it.

At the last, there is the self. The self of the one who is countercultural must be alone for much of the time, for he is one who deliberately says "no." I will not go there, do this, do that, jump through your molded hoops, associate with the dead.

I will not be but who I am. For I do hear different music.

from **Life Without Principle:**

If we have thus desecrated ourselves, — as who has not? — the remedy will be by wariness and devotion to reconsecrate ourselves, and make once more a fane of the mind. We should treat our minds, that is, ourselves, as innocent and ingenuous children, whose guardians we are, and be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention. Read not the Times. Read the Eternities. Conventionalities are at length as bad as impurities. Even the facts of science may dust the mind by their dryness, unless they are in a sense effaced each morning, or rather rendered fertile by the dews of fresh and living truth. Knowledge does not come to us by details, but in flashes of light from heaven. Yes, every thought that passes through the mind helps to wear and tear it, and to deepen the ruts, which, as in the streets of Pompeii, evince how much it has been used. How many things there are concerning which we might well deliberate whether we had better know them, — had better let their peddling-carts be driven, even at the slowest trot or walk, over that bride of glorious span by which we trust to pass at last from the farthest brink of time to the nearest shore of eternity! Have we no culture, no refinement, — but skill only to live coarsely and serve the Devil? — to acquire a little worldly wealth, or fame, or liberty, and make a false show with it, as if we were all husk and shell, with no tender and living kernel to us? Shall our institutions be like those chestnut burs which contain abortive nuts, perfect only to prick the fingers.

MLS

Fixtion: Ray Soulard, Jr.

*Boxes Redux
(Immortal Phalanx)
[a new fixtion]*

(concluded)

xiii.

The night flickers, flames, falters, flails, diminishes without defeat, readies its coming toss over dawn, over day, beyond dusk, beyond dullness, returned back to where it is right now, but a shred younger, tighter, pinker.

"Another perfect night in the universe," I say to the old darkening man aside me.

He ignores me. Continues to darken, far faster than the night itself.

"Eternity. Infinity. Art."

He's a shaking hand. He's a darkening thirst. He says nothing.

"You'll be dawn soon."

"No."

"No?"

"Not again."

"What about your religion?"

"I don't have a religion"

"What do you have?"

"I have faith."

Mr. Bob the barman refills Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker's cup, strong black coffee laced with whiskey, and retreats without word. Knickerbocker sips, slows his pace of darkening.

"Young man, when you have faith without religion you are a lone ship on an empty ocean. Floating in unknown waters, beneath our lord's constant sky, you pitch and toss to whimsical will not your own, not even yours to scrutinize.

"This ocean neither reveals its depths nor heeds your cause. But it keeps you alive while you float and receives you when you sink. You participate in its necessity. You an article of its great glory. That you exist has been ordained and is always relevant, and your demise is both inevitable and accounted-for."

My second Guinness, empty, is almost invisibly replaced by third.

"You are not alone" I say.

Knickerbocker glares at me, then sips.

"I told me acid told me so" I explain.

"Noone can help you," he replies.

I stand. "Listen. I'm not in a fucking boat in the middle of the fucking ocean! I live in a crowded city. On trains, in restaurants, along streets! People-every-fucking-where. Most either ignore me or try to get at my money. Few really care; don't give a shit that I hurt when ignored and have no money. I'm not young as such but I'm not old either."

I sit on my stool again but feel even angrier. "The world is less real but more painful all the time."

Knickerbocker nods, we touch mug to coffee cup, and drink.

xiv.

Does it take acid to make plain **YOU ARE NOT ALONE?**

There are always voices. Not just in crowded joints, slow trains, ragged streets. Alone, there's TV, radio, records. Asleep, dreams, chambers of distorted souls.

What is this obsessive preoccupation w/Beauty but a desire for sensuous moments that ghost-mirror the longgonelost?

Watching a hand add a shake of ginger to a hot drink, eyes cast around, a fecund moment, something floats undamaged, a valley, a hill, the sun beyond, meaning, song, a clean closet, green lights

YOU ARE NOT ALONE. But what to do about this. How to apply it.

It's like this: the individual is on a perpetual blind date with the world around him. Between gesture and reaction, countless happenstance, accident, revenge, selflessness on and on.

And this date is with everyone, with everything with time and space and perception and self too.

The date never ends, and rarely grows comfortable and

"Ray, this isn't going anywhere" someone says.

Yes I know.

"But **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**"

Yesss I know--

Just tell the truth, no matter how obscure, how useless, how painful, how beautiful, how it fights! how it eludes! how rapidly people walk past this joint's window! how amievergoingtogettotheherehere?

A white van and a red Nissan Pathfinder at a red traffic light. Moment, gone.

Looking down the eyes of a street that gleams with oncoming traffic.

A thumb gesture, a voice laughs, blonde hair flips in a wild arc, ceases.

Go slowly . . . just tell the truth.

He and she put on their coats after kissing, gather up, go, **THEY ARE NOT ALONE.**

Music loud, melodic, electric, thoughtful, purring, growling, pouncing by watching, now thickening, deepening, if not carnal then at least carnally flavored.

Just tell the truth. A Chevrolet and a Ford at a traffic light. Moment, gone.

xv.

But further. But more.

But closer. But less.

Tell: a crowded train, souls too close together but—
What?

What is happening invisibly?

Freedom. Annihilation.

I'm hot. I hate Boston's train system like it was the
cunt in high school whose presence tainted my every day, who
decided I was shit to be abused.

Get it?

Crowd souls in a train, day after day, and some things
go bad within.

"Is there a story here, Soulard?" Americus growls.

This! This is the story! Here! Now! While I stood up on
train, noticed backward-capped loser motherfucker stretched
out across three seats at other end of the car.

Had I gone over, he'd a probably moved his legs. But I
didn't. I waited for some other seat—which came eventually.

What I'm getting at is that too often alleged & tenured
doers of A. R. T. cast a hook into the world without using a
piece of themselves as bait. For the failure, a crowded
Boston train and a midnight New Year's eve blowjob atop the
Eiffel Tower are equally bereft of imaginative materials.

The world waits until you tell the story, sing the song,
paint the picture. It does not help you by holding still. It
merely continues while there you sit, \$10,000 computer system
dustfree & dutiful before you.

xvi.

Americus and I stand together in Boston, on a subway
platform, webby guitar music in the distance, a tight young
blonde in the slickest black slacks stands with her
girlfriends

"Watching you"

"Rejecting me" I say

"You beat them to that. Give a girl something fresh,

won't you?"

"Americus, look at me, I'm beaten, OK? I've been tripping on acid since this morning, every train stop I've been at, alot of them, I've sat on benches, lost, but writing. I went to a park and looked up at a phalanx of trees."

"Immutable phalanx" he cracks.

I nod, tired, beaten, but go on. "Today there were trees, and maniacs, and hustlers, there was psychedelic soul music in a McDonald's. There were smiles here and there--there was some sense of defeat--but I kept on"

"Nutshell it for me, Soulard"

I nod, imagine the blonde naked, better still imagine her clothed but red-haired; the train comes before I can speak.

We board. The usual ragbag of latenight train riders bound for the northern fingers of Boston.

"The blonde & her friends will get off in a stop or two"

"They like you, Americus. Get off with them."

They get off. He doesn't. He stays with me.

"Thank you."

"You need a friend."

"I need a disciple with long red hair and, shit, a good sense of humor." I bust out laughing. Americus, surprised, then pleased, joins me.

How many souls in the night are suddenly joined in laughter by brothers come from their pens?

How lost, alone, latenight ragged bag of train riders.

Yet found. Here. Now. What else? Now. Late Saturday night, last day of second month of penultimate year of the second millennium since Christ came along said live well. be here now. It's OK to be happy. You are not alone. And he was nailed but it was too late--his spirit returned to its loving Father--and his influence didn't stay around that crucifixion hill.

But something happened along the way. bad. Be Here Now became This is Yours and She is Mine and We are Right and--and-- and so on.

It's February 28, 1998. Past 11 p.m. On a train out of Boston--but mercifully not too far out. This is the story. Americus is back in his world. I am alone. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**

WRITE SOMETHING GOOD.

xvii.

She stood face to face with her life, with the truth, with the fact of him above her, below her, and she went on living, and went on dying, and endured her life, and endured her death, then as now.

She was a Beauty, oh never doubt that, I know, I held her hand every day for years, her fingers elsewhere holding a pen or dashing over a piano or waiting. Waiting. We lived on each other's land, we created each other's language, we each of us was defined by the other.

She was a Beauty, still, and I am still speaking her language, still hoping someday I'll have again someone who understands my words like she did.

I love you. Who needs to know this? I love you. I look at you before me, waiting and think: whatever I was to you, I love you and I remember you and I dream about you—listen!—

I was in North Beach, drunk by noon at Saloon, the barman sipping White Russians and blasting Frank Sinatra tunes and listen there you were, girlgodd, thighs, hands, listen girlgodd I am dancing inside my beer, my cheap glass of Miller High Life and listen there you are and I am licking the soft spot between your thigh and buttock I am inventing a small planet there, a wet world, a carnal paradise, a momentary civilization, and listen the small brutes at the bar are complaining about the endless Sinatra tunes but the barman needs a White Russian and that's that and I stumble out into the bright San Francisco day into a run for food and postcards to tell someone far away here I am here I sit listen

I sit between you blonde and you brunette and I tell you and you that I love you and you listen take this hand and take this hand and slowly by Beautys girlgodds this matters go slowly we'll love into each other we'll Chicago big and bad we'll

listen I am sitting on a train hurling through Olde Town and I am levitation and I am wondering: am I home right now? what is home? Thinking: home, then, an arrival at a place and moment of undoubted clarity,

no I want my girlgodds I don't want to be alone anymore enough girlgodds come to me it will be OK yes there will be

a loss my loss always my loss

I'll write deep into this acid trip, I'll become her
need and shout for release! I'll be the girlgoddess both I'll
falter, I'll fall, I'll fail

Or perhaps it won't happen tonight at all, perhaps I'll
just be stranded with my usual crazy self, no excuses, just
me and a strange cosmos just me and all the lights just out
now just me and pinkcheeked want just me crimson & clover
over & over oover&oover

Perhaps, last resort, to return to the story begun many
pages ago, and occasionally continued and occasionally

"Tell the fucking story, Soulard" advises Americus.

"Write something good" adds Rebecca nicely.

Thank you.

xviii.

Rebecca knows Franny will come back but she also knows
that her father will have to fight a thousand thousand
demons for this to occur. That's what the door will be for.

But beyond this. Rebecca is home right now at Luna T's
moreso than in all years past. Since the Arcadia Bookstore &
Cafe burned down, Rebecca has been coming to Luna T's as she
once went to the bookstore. She is discovering this place
every day, and making decisions about it every day.

High school has come to mean nothing to her. She has no
friends there, none she'd invite to meet her friends at Luna
T's Cafe, muchless meet her dad.

But she does know people from her Arcadia days, and with
these she has intent. Plans to nurture, plans to protect
Luna T's and its family, her family.

But first. A train ride. A summoning of an old friend. A
favor. Determined.

xix.

Noone had asked Rebecca to her high school's Junior Prom
last year—at least noone she could remember.

"What if he had asked you to the dance at Bougival?" I
ask slyly. I am on this train, too.

She starts more at my question than at my sudden

appearance. "Who?" she demands, annoyed, curious.

"Any of them. You would have said yes, wouldn't you?"

Now simply annoyed, she stares me small. "You?"

I shake my head.

"Why not?"

"You're 17. I'm almost 34. Your father would make sure I never get there."

She's still looking at me. "I know about you and Franny."

She's dressed in leather and denim. Her hair is long and golden brown. Her eyes are a killing blue.

"I didn't intend to write this, Rebecca."

"I know."

"But now it's written."

"Yes."

"Can I go now?"

"No."

OK. Fine. Who else really? She's my favorite person on this planet.

"Thank you."

I look at her and realize that I am in love with who she has become, realize that I couldn't possibly stand her being with anyone else.

"Rebecca."

"Yes?"

"You're who I should have been with when I was 17. I missed out on you then. There was a girl then, her name was Jenny, but she didn't love me romantically. She loved me fraternally. She didn't understand that I already had a sister—that I needed a girlfriend!"

"I was born in 1980."

"Yes."

She takes my hand and kisses it. "I'll take care of you. We need to be with each other. Don't be afraid."

I laugh. "No! I won't be afraid about dating a 17-year-old girl, a fixtional creation at that. Nobody will think I'm crazy. Or crazier. They all know I'm nuts."

She smiles. "Be 17 with me."

I cringe, hope. Deflate, no. "No. I can't. I'm 33."

"But you'll be with me?"

"Until the cops come."

"What cops?"

"I don't know. Maybe the Puritans."

She smiles that damned smile of hers and I know I'm done.

"This was inevitable, wasn't it?"

"I guess so. Can we talk about my dad's place now?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"The walls need to be secured."

"They're strong enough."

"No. I was getting ready to do something about it when you showed up."

I almost bitch but don't. Don't fuck up this one, Soulard. "OK," I say.

Rebecca looks from me all around the empty City Rail traincar we occupy, been in a tunnel now for too long.

"Godd! Godd the little pink bear!" she calls.

The train leaves its tracks, is levitating, is now only the one car we're in, and the landscape outside is pink, completely pink.

Godd the little pink bear is floating outside now, a train conductor's cap, cocked, for attire.

Looks at me, darkly. I shrug. "Sorry. She doesn't like the boys in her world and the girls in my world don't like me. So who else?" Godd nods, even more darkly.

"Godd, I need a favor please."

" "

"I need you to coat the walls of Luna T's with yourself."

Godd laughs, the sound of Australia being invented.

"There'll be no more fires, OK?"

"Yes."

"Are you done?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

Godd is glowering at me again.

"I'm sorry!" I yell.

"No," Godd sez. "I'm sorry."

I wait for more but the train is back on the tracks and a recorded voice is announcing "Old State House." I offer Rebecca my hand and we leave the train and exit the station.

"Someone did ask me to the Prom," she sez. We find a bench behind the Old State House, recently renovated, grounds and building.

"Who?"

"It doesn't matter really, does it? Just thinking about this made you act."

"Yes."

"Aren't you glad?"

"Rebecca, what am I about that this is happening? Of course I love you. But what am I?"

She moves closer to me. "Ray, I don't have anyone else. I know my dad is going to look for Franny and I want him to find her. I want him to marry her so she never goes away again. Don't you see that? But you're right—I don't like the boys in my school. How could I? Would they understand me asking my friend Godd to paint the walls of Luna T's with Goddpink? No. They see me and I'm a girl. But they're not enough for me."

I nod. "I know. And what girl in my world would care for someone who writes like this? I haven't met her yet."

"I understand. You know that."

"And your father?"

"He already knows."

"Is that good?"

"Who can he trust more than the man who created me? And him? And this whole world?"

"Wait—"

"Look, you're the writer. And I'm the character you love most of all. I'm your lead actress. I embody what you cherish in girls and Art and, um, life. How could you not love me now that I'm an adult?"

"At 17?"

She smiles at me and we kiss briefly. I pull back, feeling smacked hard.

"Relax."

"Someone hit me!"

"You did."

"How?"

"You just wrote that down, about someone smacking you hard! What's wrong?"

"I didn't intend this."

"No?"

"No. I thought you were going to be romanced by an older man but I never intended that it would be me. I imagined someone dark, a poet, someone that would make you think of Renoir and Monet."

"Don't you believe him" snaps Merry Muse, smilingly.
I glare at Her.
"He's a man. He's talking," she explains sardonically.
"Hi Merry" says Rebecca, suspiciously. She huddles near me.

"Goodness, child! I'm not your rival!"
"Franny didn't like you"
Merry laughs, bells and horses.
I stand. "Do you think this is wrong?"
Merry waves in merriment. "You're asking me? Boy, you're writing like a maniac right now! That's all I care about. If this sweet thing will help you, I'll spin the records and work the strobelights."

Rebecca stands, too. "Merry, you know you can't approve of us even if you want to. Love and Art are the deepest allies and hardest rivals."

Merry's blue eyes catch us up and carry us away; Rebecca and I are entwined. Her warmth almost hurts.

"I approve for now," sez the wind that twists us through blind ether, setting us down finally at the bar-entrance to Luna T's Cafe.

xx.

Rebecca has assured Luna T's Cafe's safety; it is now lined with Godd's pink protection, the same kind of pink that once ripped through the Arcadia Bookstore & Cafe and destroyed it because a stupid man had chosen Rebecca to be his carnal treat.

I know this. I was there. I wrote it all down. I watched my new girlfriend, before she was my new girlfriend, lying on an old couch, acidtripfirst, being unwrapped and nearly taken by the man who was soon destroyed.

My new girlfriend is a special friend of Godd the little pink bear and Merry Muse and Dr. Knickerbocker, and she is the daughter of Richard James Americus, a big man who only befriends, it seems, other big men.

Am I in trouble?

"No, Soulard, you're not. Not yet."

"You approve of your daughter's strange new beau?"

"Not yet. Make her happy. Do the boyfriend things none of the rest of us can do. Write something good. Then I'll

let you know."

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Beautiful?"

"Can Ray help us redecorate Luna T's?"

Americus laughs so hard he falls off his stool at the bar. Rebecca helps him up.

Mr. Bob brings a new round of drinks. Guinness. Guinness. Milk.

Americus points a remote control at the TV and flicks it on, still laughing.

I cringe.

xxi.

Sip a beer. Watching. My new girlfriend near me. She likes me. I'm adjusting to this happily.

I look at her smiling. "Yes" she replies.

The TV is on a program the bar has often stayed open on Sunday night to watch. Its regulars like the whole Sunday night lineup in fact.

"Coming up this week on FOX High Speed Crashes IV and Secrets of the World's Greatest Brothels III. Next week on The Simpsons, cartoon irony and less than subtle drug references followed by King of the Hill's growing obsession with deep cultural strangeness. Now, back to the X-Files, on FOX, soon to be a major motion picture"

"Yes FOX!" one drunk at the bar roars. "Cartoons and tits and UFOs and highspeed crashes! I get all my news on Sunday night!"

I look at Rebecca again, who's delighting in how much in love with her I am. "Daddy" she whispers sharply and they retreat to the bandroom.

I can follow. I can write their dialogue. I am good at their dialogue.

"Daddy!"

"Rebby."

"He really likes me. I mean, he knows who I am and he likes me. His looks at me makes me blush but it's OK for once."

"I know, Rebby. When it's right, blushing feels good. It's exciting."

"Daddy, you're OK?"

"Rebby, look at you! You're happy! He'll take care of you while I'm gone."

"Daddy Orpheus. Franny Eurydice."

"Yes."

"He's scared, too."

"It's because he's becoming more ours than ever before. His own world has disappointed him too much."

"I have to take care of him."

"You don't know, Rebby."

"Are you going to advise me? I'm, um, OK about that."

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I trust you. Because you & I are the best friends ever. This part, early on, you'll be fine. Everyone is."

"And later?"

"You know. You told me: you're my best girl. You always will be."

"He's not gonna be jealous, is he?"

"No. He understands. He made us possible. He respects us too much to change things carelessly."

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Reb?"

"I love you so much. I want you to have Franny back. I want us all to be safe and together. We have to try, OK?"

"Yes. We have to."

"Are you listening, Ray?"

"As fast as I can write."

"Well, you have to go now. I'll be back."

xxii.

I sit at the bar of Luna T's Cafe, sipping my Guinness, watching "X-Files." Dana Sculley stands on a bridge with many others as the UFOs that once abducted her return.

I look at Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker next to me, drinking his dozenth black coffee laced with whiskey.

"Jack Daniels?" I ask.

He nods. "**Tonight.**"

"I'm Rebecca's new boyfriend. Are you going to be mad about this?"

"You've joined thy humble craft to another."

"Why would you approve? You love her! You think I'm the devil!"

Knickerbocker, shaky, sips. **"Your iniquitous days are done, sir. You have been blessed. You are foul no more."** He shifts his shoulders away from me then, away from the TV, away from human interchange.

Wow.

Rebecca returns and her face glows to see me friendly with Knickerbocker.

"You're a good child"

"Thank you, Mr. Knickerbocker."

"Perhaps you will take him with you someday."

Rebecca smiles, says nothing.

Americus is thinking about Franny, missing her badly. Seeing Rebecca happy with me, new days of love, releases him to be sad.

Franny, I will be coming. There isn't any doubt.

She knows, Americus.

xxiii.

For a moment elsewhere, for a moment merely a gonedaddy song, for a moment a flock of flashing hair, for a moment a descent, an ascent, a goddsmile, a forgotten, a brown building in dusky sunlight, a carrying-on into blur, rise of old language and he say:

Where am I?

and you cannot really tell him that all he knew is all over, that what constituted eternity for him crumbled in mere years after his passing and yet that his improbably reappearance tells you, anonymous watching you, that all is not as it seems all is not as it seems, all is not as it seems

So you, anonymous you, in this moment of elsewhere, take his shoulder and pardner him back to the bar, to a backseat, no view of window, no view of barman, even the radio is too

far away now but you are with him, he knows this, he studies the red menu which is blank, he looks at his empty beermug, bubbly with drink loved a longgone day, and he might rise a smile, he might not, but the acceptance glowing in his heart, and the defiance growing in your own are all that's left here that's important so raise empty glasses in toast to acceptance, to defiance, to bars so far away as to be irrelevant, to hearts clutched and growing nearer and bigger all the time

xxiv.

"Thank you" sez Rebecca when I finish reading and she kisses me far more woman she's become than little girl I once knew.

I step from my barstool and take her hand, we leave the bar. Walk to parking garage entrance next to Luna T's and by escalator arrive at the rooftop. Empty. Lean against out ledge. She melds into me hugging, laughing.

"They think I'm crazy, Ray."

"And me?"

"They know you're crazy!"

Knowing by now that laughter's denied me, she leans back. "What?"

"I couldn't stand living if I hurt you."

"But I'm fine!"

"Rebecca, you're more real to me than almost anything else. You have your own personality, and free will, but we're one person at bottom."

"And you're not like this, um, with others?"

I see her angle and she sees mine. Now I can smile.

xxv.

"Days pass. Et cetera and whatever. So now it's today. Now it's now and I'm tripping on acid again. Rebecca, my young love"

"And you want to know why, right?"

"Yes. I want to know why but that's not really it, is it?"

"Ray, just calm down. I'm here. This is just about you &

me."

"Me holding onto my sanity"

"You holding but also asking why."

"So what do I do? What do we do?"

"We try. No—I wouldn't say that, would I? What would I say? I'd tell you to hold onto me really good and if you were scared to hold on even tighter."

"Is it possible to be cool without knowing it? Like you kept it from yourself for some dire, secretive reason but now that doesn't matter because you think you're OK and sometimes you even feel OK but this feeling is so unlike the most of your life that you can't account for any of it?"

"Ray, what are you saying?"

"I'm tripping. I'm in a bookstore where the lights are too damned bright and everything reflects off everything else to intensify the overall brightness."

"But what are you saying to me?"

"I want to draw a nude of you. I want to paint and sing a nude of you. You are my Suzanne Valadon, I am your Pierre-Auguste Renoir even though I am not fixtional as you I am trying my damndest to become so."

She nods and I arrange my colors, tones, and words as I think they should be.

She is going to pose for me, nude, in words, in songs, in colors. I want to render Her, the Beauty in which she participates, on the page, on the canvas, in the vibrating air around us.

Yet for one who knows me so well, she is shy.

"I'm not your young friend anymore. I'm your lover. We have to get used to this."

"Are you OK?"

Brown eyes manifest and knock me over a table. "Am I OK? I'm waiting for you, old guy! I'm 17, you're 33, who's waiting for who? I mean, I don't care but I just had to say it's not me, the pinkcheeked virgin, that's holding us back. I'm ready. You're not."

"You're not helping."

"I'm here for you. I'll pose. You know that."

"Freely?"

"How else? And, um, you for me after."

"Me? Pose for you? I'm not some pretty girl. I'm old and dingy. I'm nearly pretty awful, in truth."

"No. You're not. You love me in a way I've never been

loved before."

"How?"

"For you I am Artist, Woman, but also Friend, Lover, and Muse. You mix these all up with your girls. Makes it hard on most of them."

"I'm sorry, Rebecca."

"No, I didn't mean that. I meant that most girls aren't all those things even if they tried so it's hard. You want so much from them. It's doomed to failure."

"It is?"

"Ray, just love me. Look at my pictures and be happy and don't expect that I can give more than I can."

"Oh."

"But that's alot. But it's not everything. No one girl can be everything to you or you to her. That you're writing at all right now is somewhat miraculous. The page is pulsing, isn't it?"

"Yes, Rebecca. It is. I hear you through music & hallucinations but I still want to portray made with the touch of one who hasn't loved you yet and the definite sense of your beauty, your fragility, your virginity but also what comes from regally-held institutions."

"What?"

"I don't know. The music is too strange, the night seems bound elsewhere. But go on."

"Rebecca, I'm hallucinating Christian rites I neither understand nor believe. I hear obvious violins and subterranean whisperings. Which way should I go?"

"I don't know."

"When did stories become acid trips? When did life stop meaning very much to me and so less meaningful to anyone who expected anything from me? What am I these days when not tripping?"

"I don't know. You'd probably say not very much."

"I'd be right."

"You'd be wrong."

xxvi.

We are in Luna T's bandroom now, and it's well past midnight. I am tired but ready for many things.

But go slowly. This time, go slowly.

"First time," I explain.

"No it isn't," she says.

We have a box of candles, each one a foot long, red, gold, blue, purple, white, dark green, and these we divide between us and set on tables and chairs and the floor and on the raised bandstage. We work from opposite ends of the room, and light up each other's candles, moving slowly toward the center-front spot of the stage. I've put on an old record, an old friend, one I met in 1981, when I was 17. Billy Joel's Turnstiles. Rebecca knows it, nods smiling at me when she hears it.

We sit now, close together, but without touching.

"Why don't the Beatles get back together?

Why don't nobody sing of romance?"

Billy sings. Ironic, percussive music.

Rebecca grows anxious beside me as I watch the candles and don't speak. Still, awhile longer passes before I speak.

"It's funny how deep I've gone into these stories. There is no division anymore, no boundary. Back there, where I sit writing this, I'm poor and too alone and scared. I'm trying not to fail—"

Rebecca hurls into my arms, knocking me into the stage. She kisses me more like biting. I hold her but am not done talking.

"Rebecca, here, in this world, I'm to succeed. When I write, back there, nothing can touch me."

She lets me up, a little. "I'm not going to lose you," she growls.

I sit up and hold her and there sits in my arms a woman, as real as I've ever known. She is pretty and sweet, and funny, and childly charming, but these are baubles on a woman's soul.

She is no longer her father's child foremost, or a refiguring of a longlost angel from my own life. She is her own voice, her own soul. I want to kiss her but not yet. Go slowly.

"There's a place in the world
for the angry young man
with his working class ties
and his radical plans"

sings voice & piano.

Her body in my arms is both soft and strong. Flesh,
muscle, bone. Breasts arrived at fullness, hips round, ready.

"I once believed in causes too
I had my pointless point of view
But life went on no matter
Who was wrong or right"

harsh electric lament.

Hair long and soft too, unfettered, eyes blue today,
dusky ocean blue.

I want to say "I love you, Rebecca," here & now, piano
music, many candles, hearts breathing, but I don't.

I want her to hold me, to near crush me with her young
love, to recall me to being 17 and hearing this music for
the first time.

She pulls back a bit, confused.

"No," I say. She returns.

"It's not you, Rebecca. It's me. I've left the path. I
won't be on it again."

She nods.

"I have Art, Rebecca, nothing else is real or important.
Being with you here is part of that. I don't believe in my
world anymore. I pass through it, meaningless hours, until
I'm back inside a painting, or a song, or a poem, or in my
own work."

She nods. Watching me, feeling the grip of our hands.

"There are not many who remember
They say a handful still survive
to tell the world about
the day the lights went out
to keep the memory alive . . . "

album's prophetic tuneful fade.

Frosting me with her bright skin, her clothes shed
themselves. "You're ready to portray me," she whispers, now
arms around my waist, now mouth inside my mouth, now eyes
I'm listening to, now blood, now vapor, now eternity simply
defined as soft round cheek, pink deity.

xxvii.

Surrounding myself with red and gold candles, now psychedelic music shivering from the walls, I watch her as she-nude stands on Luna T's Cafe's bandstage.

I'm a painter, Rebecca, but use only black ink and lingual scratchings, and this has to do, this has to be.

Her arms folded under her breasts, she faces me with her body but looks off to her left.

I begin to talk and write at the same time. "Rebecca, my love, I can't be so very far away and render you truly. The flames of the candles surrounding me burn off my clothes and I disintegrate with the smoke and float toward you."

Pause.

"I curl at your hip, lather across your waist, round and round the breadth of it, moving slowly upwards at one end and downwards at the other until I am smoking figure eight around your dear breasts and I am sliding down down buttocks, under, into your vagina, deeper, into your womb, filling it, filling it, for a moment, for just a moment you are my someday wife and I am our dreamchild and all is not lost all is not lost all is not lost all is not lost—"

Pause. Still.

"Becoming more fog than smoke, and hardening too, I squeeze your breasts and tighten suckinhalemouth on your nipples and you breathe hard and sway and down below I have retreated and hardened too, now a foggy cloud near to the shape of a hardpricked wetmouthed man."

Pause. Disintegrate again.

"I am traveling upwards now, clinging to your strong heart at one end as it pumps and pumps and raining upward and through your neck and now into your mouth"

"And I stop you, there. I suck you entirely into my mouth and you harden into a penis that I suck hard on and you grip and you rise and you release, alot, years of semen into my throat, years of loneliness and loss into my throat I am swallowing you some some will never escape, I am feeling with my tongue and lips every ridge and contour of your penis a beautiful, hard brief branch and I know how to do this I've been waiting so long to do this"

"And what of me that doesn't slide down your throat

leaves your mouth, pours outward to cover your beautiful eyes and pink cheeks, to tangle, dampen, drench your long hair, I am your very own shower, I am yours, I love you, Rebecca, I love you, Rebecca, all is not lost, all is not lost all is not lost"

"Finally, you rest on my shoulders, drying, becoming a man again, becoming solid again, and now you are a man again, much bigger than me, but you're hanging on will-lessly and I will hold you up for as long as it takes. For as long as it takes"

xxviii.

We dress slowly, and leave Luna T's. Dawn is not far off as she helps me walk down snowy, empty Hartford streets toward 50 Harvest Street, toward her home, toward her own bed.

She watches me as I sleep in her bed. She touches my hair, my cheek. Sitting in her chair, she uses pencil & sketchpad to render in barely a dozen strokes a picture she titles: "Haiku: Soul Mate."

After awhile, shy, unable to sleep, confused again, she steps into the living room and finds her father sitting in his old green chair by the front window, readying to play his guitar. Wonderfully glad, she flits behind his chair and hugs him. He makes room for her and they sit together and he plays.

And he sings:

"First day of spring, snowfall
All is perfect, beautiful"

and he picks and strums his way through a sunrise musical prayer. Spritely. Spritelier. Soft, softer. Landing on grass.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Beautiful?"

"Remember you told me to, um, guess good about what's necessary in life?"

"Of course."

"Well, I did. And, um, Ray did too."

"Good."

"I'm happy, Dad."

"I know."

"But you're not."

"No."

"You will be."

"Maybe. Yes."

Waking up, this morning, first day of spring, snowfall, all is perfect, eternal, waking up with a young woman in my arms, listening to her breathe, tell the truth, she is soft skin, she is starshine. Today, every moment, a miracle, awaiting every soul's command. Another day, another gift, sun, rising, rising

Ⓟ 3-23-98
Cambridge, MA

Essay: Dale R. Gowin

Confession of an Amerikan LSD Eater

This essay was written in 1991 while the author was incarcerated at Elmira Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison in New York State.

So here I am, locked in a cage in an ancient, crumbling dungeon, doomed to spend a decade of my life marching through these murky corridors under the watchful gaze of club-wielding cops with bloated guts and beady, piggish pink eyes—cops that will open my mail, control the clothes I wear and the food I eat, examine my urine for outlaw molecules, and search my rectal cavity to make sure I'm not hiding any forbidden objects. For companions in these corridors I have a motley crew of social misfits, some like Arlo Guthrie used to

say "mother-stabbers and father-rapers," some thieves, bank robbers, muggers and con men, some revolutionary warriors and enemies of the State, and an increasing number like myself who are condemned to this fate because of a fondness for forbidden visionary vegetables.



Yes, I am one of the most despised and despicable of media monsters, that blight of corruption against morality and decency and law'n' order—one who chooses to partake of consciousness-altering flowering herbs and alchemical essences—a drug user! Ever since my discovery in the late 1960s of the miraculous and magical mind-manifesting powers of psychedelics, I have continued to occasionally use and enjoy these heretical vegetable products. Further, I have spoken out honestly, in print and from the public stage,

about my belief that these products should be legal so that those of us who choose to use them can do so without fear. It has been my opinion that the lungs, stomach, bloodstreams and brains of individual citizens are beyond the legitimate limits of government authority—and that in a free society, people should be

free to grow, prepare, use and exchange whatever vegetable products they like, without interference from the State.

Busted

Over the last couple of decades, I have continued to publicly oppose prohibition laws and other forms of social and political authoritarianism. This open activism caused me to come under the surveillance of the "authorities," and it came to pass that I was busted in a sting operation in the city of Syracuse, New York, late in the evening of October 17, 1990.

A "friend" who I had known and trusted for many years had decided to earn some extra income for himself (or, perhaps, exculpate himself from a legal embarrassment of his own) as a paid informant to the Thought Police. He arranged to introduce me to an undercover police agent, who expressed an interest in LSD and asked me if I could find him some.

This wolf in sheep's clothing (a skillful agent who specializes in entrapping drug heretics, a former New York State Police officer by the name of Christopher A. Wiegand) wove a web of lies and deceit around me to establish his credibility. He wore his hair long and shaggy; he dressed in old, ragged jeans and motorcycle boots; he affected countercultural mannerisms of speech and demeanor; he smoked pot with me at my house on a number of occasions. I located some LSD for him as he requested, and he came to my house to pick it up.

At first he bought a few hits, and then he returned for increasingly larger quantities. On the final occasion, he had worked his way up to a bundle of ten sheets (each sheet containing 100 doses of LSD in little squares of blotter paper). On this visit, he brought a team of heavily armed police thugs with him. They were waiting at my front door when I opened it to let him out.

Suddenly I found myself looking down the barrels of six 45-caliber pistols. I was thrown to the ground, pummeled, kicked, handcuffed, and hauled back into my home for a few hours of interrogation. While two of the thugs "questioned" me (trying to convince me to

turn informant so that I could "get off easy"), the rest of the team proceeded to "search" my apartment. They had a great time and did a very thorough job. They ripped up and smashed everything in sight—pulling books down from the shelves of my private library and heaping them on the floor; demolishing the shelves themselves; tearing paintings from the walls and trampling them; hurling computers and stereo equipment across the room. Records and tapes and files of documents were strewn about like rubble. They confiscated a selection of books and documents to be used as evidence against me. In the course of the search, they found some more sheets of LSD, a small amount of marijuana, a single dried peyote button, and a set of scales.

I found myself facing six felony charges and a handful of misdemeanors (including multiple counts of sales, possession with intent to sell, and possession of a controlled substance). My court-appointed attorney told me that, since I had a previous drug-related indiscretion on my record, I faced a probable 25-to-life sentence, unless I was willing to switch sides and help prosecute my comrades. I spoke of challenging the charges on constitutional grounds, but I was told that this would virtually guarantee a maximum sentence. Other lawyers I sought advice from concurred, citing the prevailing political climate. (Shortly after I was busted, an undercover cop was killed during a failed sting operation—unfortunately not the cop that nailed me—and the media was filled with anti-drug hysteria that approached a lynch-mob mentality. The judge assigned to my case was evidently persuaded that my offenses exceeded in seriousness such paltry crimes as mere murder, rape or grand larceny.)

After I had cooled my heels in the county jail for three months (in lieu of \$50,000 bail), the D.A. evidently realized that I wasn't going to "cooperate" with the Unholy Inquisition, and I was offered a "plea bargain" in which the original charges against me were dropped and a charge of "conspiracy" was substituted—a handy, all-purpose charge which can have any meaning they choose to give it. At first, this deal came with a 12-to-life sentence (at least 12 years

in prison followed by a lifetime on parole), but eventually, as I continued to hold out and demand a jury trial, they dropped it down to 6-to-12, and I was told that this was the final offer—I could take it or go with a jury trial and surely get the maximum 25-to-life sentence. So, swallowing my misgivings, I took the deal.

My experience was not an uncommon one. Recent statistics indicate that there are more than 1.5 million Americans currently incarcerated in jails and prisons [*over 2 million as of Feb. 2000*], and that something close to 50% of us are locked up for prohibition violations.

Behind the Scenes in the "War on Drugs"

So, here I am: a prisoner-of-war in the "war on drugs."

A look beneath the veneer of propaganda shows that this "drug war" is a deceptive and insidious attack on human freedom, waged by an ultra-rich class of corporate profiteers who have successfully subverted the American political system and are attempting to establish a stranglehold on the entire world—a "new world order" that will ensure their global economic and political dominance. The drug prohibition laws are one element in their conspiracy, one cog in their machine of global domination.

The "drug war" is the epitome of hypocrisy. The politicians who wage this war against users of non-approved drugs are nearly all addicted to alcohol, tobacco and caffeine, which are among the deadliest drugs ever used by humans.

Tobacco alone causes over 400,000 deaths of Americans annually.

Alcohol is the direct cause of over 125,000 U.S. deaths each year, and it is responsible for many times that number of deaths because of its correlation with traffic accidents, homicides and domestic violence.

Even caffeine, which is loaded into children's candies and soft drinks, causes over a thousand deaths in the USA each year.

In comparison, all illegal drugs, including the most

harmful, cause less than 5,000 U.S. deaths annually. And the #1 target of the "drug war," marijuana, *has never caused a single death in all of history anywhere in the world*, despite the fact that it has been more widely used, and more thoroughly studied, than any other mind-altering vegetable product.

This fact was admitted by Francis L. Young, a D.E.A. administrative law judge, in an official ruling in 1988. He confirmed that there are no known deaths attributable to marijuana use, and stated that marijuana is "one of the safest therapeutically active substances known to man," and added, "In strict medical terms, marijuana is far safer than many foods we commonly consume."

Tobacco, besides being more deadly to human health than any other legal or illegal recreational drug, is also one of the most addictive. It is often easier to kick a heroin habit than to stop smoking tobacco. Yet, the U.S. mass media is littered with seductive ads urging consumers to get hooked. These ads are prominently displayed on giant billboards in every major American city, on highways and at concerts and sporting events. They use subliminal techniques to manipulate the minds of the people. And the U.S. government subsidizes tobacco growers at taxpayers' expense.

Secret Government Drug Trafficking

But there is another level of "drug war" hypocrisy that is even more insidious.

While the U.S. government has been prosecuting users of illegal drugs, it has been engaging in secret trafficking in heroin and cocaine with the aid of the CIA, to finance "covert" military operations.

Many veterans returning from Vietnam in the early 1970s described how they had witnessed, or had been forced to participate in, the smuggling of tons of heroin into the U.S. from the Southeast Asian "golden triangle" during Nixon's "secret" incursions into Laos and Cambodia. The heroin was loaded into sealed coffins supposedly containing the dismembered corpses of American soldiers.

In the 1980s, the same type of government-sponsored drug trafficking occurred with cocaine (and there are indications it continues today). The CIA arranged the importation of thousands of tons of cocaine into the U.S. from Central and South America and the Middle East, to provide covert funding for the Nicaraguan "contra" war. Details of these dealings leaked out during the Iran-Contra congressional hearings, and the story was widely reported by the newspapers of the world—except in the U.S., where it was totally suppressed. The government of Costa Rica identified Oliver North, John Poindexter, and Richard Secord as conspirators in a cocaine trafficking plot, along with CIA operative John Hull, whose Costa Rican ranch was used as a transshipment point for drugs and arms.

This covert government involvement in drug trafficking was designed to serve a dual political purpose. On the international level, it provides financial support for covert military operations in the Third World, in furtherance of the strategy of "low intensity warfare" in support of U.S.-based multinational corporations.

Domestically, the proliferation of debilitating drugs is used to destabilize the oppressed populations of the inner cities, to counteract potentially revolutionary tendencies, and to provide a pretext for the militarization of domestic law enforcement and the erosion of traditionally-protected civil liberties, bringing us a step closer to the monolithic police state that the corporate oligarchs have planned for America and the "new world order."

Heroin flooded the streets of U.S. cities during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It rapidly plummeted in price, giving Nixon the diversion he needed to veil his major crackdown on dissidents and revolutionaries (including the FBI's "ColIntelPro" purges and the police assassination attacks on the Black Panther Party, and the frame-up of Timothy Leary on pot charges as he was putting together his campaign for governor of California). Part of this wave of repression was the draconian anti-drug law that was sponsored in New York State by governor Nelson Rockefeller, the Butcher of Attica.

Under the Carter administration, there was a brief, partial thaw in the anti-drug rhetoric, during which some marijuana "decriminalization" bills were being passed by state legislatures, and some research was conducted on marijuana's many medicinal properties. But with Reagan's "October Surprise" takeover of the federal government, this liberalization abruptly ended. Positive findings about marijuana's value in medicine were suppressed. Cocaine flooded U.S. cities in unprecedented abundance, dropping rapidly in price. George Bush, former CIA director under president Ford and Reagan's top anti-drug enforcer, toured the country making speeches about the new menace of "crack" just as it was being introduced into America's underground markets, as if he were a soap salesman drumming up interest in a new brand of detergent.

The Anti-Cannibis Conspiracy

Under Nixon/Ford and Reagan/Bush, the major prohibition enforcement target was the least harmful of all recreational drugs: marijuana. Why this irrational national vendetta against this harmless, healing herb?

The carefully suppressed truth is that the marijuana plant—*Cannabis sativa* or "Indian hemp"—was once a major industrial resource that threatened the monopoly profits of the petrochemical industry and other interrelated corporate interests. Paper, textiles, plastics, paints and varnishes, medicines and thousands of other products were once made from hemp. It was also a source of clean burning fuels that are viable alternatives to gasoline and coal.

Technical advances in hemp processing in the 1930s caused a resurgence in the hemp industry that could have triggered a revolutionary shift in the American economy, putting the giant petrochemical-based monopoly corporations out of business and transferring their profits to a "grass-roots" network of independent, agriculturally-based enterprises.

Hemp products were in the public domain and could not be controlled by exclusive patents; thus they eluded the control of monopoly-based megabusiness conglomerates.

The incestuously interlocked petroleum, chemical,

paper, banking and pharmaceutical corporations (DuPont, Hearst, Mellon, GM, Rockefeller, etc.) joined forces in a blatant conspiracy to destroy the hemp industry, which they couldn't compete with in a free market. Through the control of the nation's media, they fabricated the "reefer madness" campaign of anti-drug hysteria, and under its influence the fraudulent "Marihuana Tax Act" was pushed through Congress with a minimum of debate.

Before hemp prohibition began in 1938, marijuana and hashish were widely used and commonly accepted by the U.S. population with no hint of negative effects. Cannabis was listed in the U.S. Pharmacopoeia with over 100 different medical uses, and it was as popular an over-the-counter medicinal ingredient as aspirin and Tylenol are today. "Turkish smoking parlors" were open for business in all major U.S. cities, and hashish smoking concessions were a popular attraction at the Worlds' Fairs. Hashish candy was sold openly in corner drug stores and through the Sears catalog. Yet, a few years after hemp prohibition began, all traces of cannabis and the hemp industry had vanished from the American media, school curricula, and history books, in one of the most thorough Orwellian cover-ups in modern history.

Psychedelics: Mind-Manifesting Magical Medicines

There is another reason that the State tries fanatically and fruitlessly to keep the people from using marijuana: *it gets you high*.

Like the other psychedelics, marijuana can expand human consciousness. This is threatening to the State, which bases its power on the ignorance and superstition of the masses.

Drugs like alcohol and tobacco, or heroin and cocaine, are useful to the State: they induce an intoxicated stupor, keep users dumb and gullible, and promote attitudes of competition and aggressiveness. They set up chain reactions of addictive cravings, insuring a steady stream of customers and profits.

Psychedelics, on the other hand, tend to awaken the mind from the hypnotic somnambulism of

Amerikan consumer culture. Psychedelics are "anti-brainwashing agents," stimulating users to question the assumptions of the establishment and to break through the indoctrination and conditioning that the State uses to turn us into obedient robot consumer/worker/soldier/housewife/bureaucrats. Psychedelics can widen the horizons of the mind, awakening the creative imagination.

Besides cannabis, the major psychedelics are:

- * LSD (made from ergot, a purple fungus that grows on rye, or from the seeds of certain varieties of morning glory and Hawaiian Rosewood flowers);

- * mescaline (from peyote and other cactuses native to Mexico and the American southwest); and

- * psilocybin (from "magic mushrooms").

Each of these has its own unique subtleties of effect, but they all share the same basic characteristics. They expand the scope and complexity of perception, thought, comprehension, and imagination. They amplify the brain's access to input through all sensory channels. Previously "subconscious" and "unconscious" mental contents are brought into the spotlight of conscious awareness.

These effects were noted by early researchers. Aleister Crowley, a British poet and mystical philosopher who experimented with cannabis and mescaline, described their effects as a "loosening of the girders of the soul" in his 1909 essay, *The Psychology of Hashish*. Aldous Huxley described the effects of mescaline as an opening of "the doors of perception" and wrote that it provided access to "the antipodes of the mind."

Psychedelics are not "hallucinogens": this derogatory term is used in State-sponsored anti-drug propaganda, just as all illegal drugs are often included under the blanket term "narcotics"—including cocaine, which is a powerful stimulant, the opposite of a narcotic. The alterations of perception caused by psychedelics are not hallucinations in the strict sense

of the term. Rather, they are amplifications and magnifications of perceptions and mental functions, analogous to the altered perceptions caused by looking through the lenses of a telescope or a microscope.

There are some drugs which are true "hallucinogens"—i.e., which induce a confusion of the senses in which false perceptions are mistaken for real—including the belladonna / jimson weed / henbane family of herbs, sources of the drugs atropine and scopolamine. These drugs are in a distinct class from the psychedelics, as unbiased scientific studies of the subject make clear.

The term "psychedelic" was coined by Dr. Humphrey Osmond in the 1950s. It is derived from the Greek words *psyche*, soul or mind, and *delos*, to manifest or make clear; thus, the meaning of the term is "mind manifesting" or "soul-clarifying." Since the 1960s, the word has entered into popular usage to describe such varied subjects as clothing styles and techniques of musical or artistic expression, but in its original sense it remains the most accurate scientific term for the unique class of consciousness-expanding drugs.

Simply stated, psychedelics affect consciousness by triggering increased amounts of neurotransmitters to flood the synapses of the brain, thus allowing the brain to process a larger percentage of the information streaming in through the nervous system. The effect is like switching on a bright light in a dimly lit room, or like waking up from a lifelong semi-sleep, to a higher degree of wakefulness than you've ever known.

LSD and the other major psychedelics were made illegal in 1966, at a time when they were having a major effect, both in the world of scientific, medical and philosophical research, and in the world of popular culture, where they were triggering a worldwide renaissance in music, art, literature and fashion that was affecting human society in innumerable ways.

Research with LSD showed that it had tremendous value as an aid to psychotherapy and in the treatment of alcoholism. LSD therapy was found to provide more permanent recovery from alcohol addiction than any other method, before or since. A landmark study in the early 1960s showed that a few sessions with psilocybin could cause a major drop in recidivism among prison

inmates convicted for violent crimes. LSD was found to ease the fear of death in terminal cancer patients. Yet, despite these and many other positive discoveries, all research with psychedelics was curtailed when prohibition was enacted.

Passage of laws against psychedelics was supported by a proliferation of distorted and fabricated propaganda in the mass media, in a replay of the successful anti-marijuana campaign of the 1930s. Popular myths remain today among the majority of the public that is unaware of the scientific literature on the subject; that LSD causes chromosome damage, for instance—news stories correcting this fallacy were buried on the back pages of the daily papers and had little effect on the impressions made by the banner headlines that had originally proclaimed the scare stories.

Freedom of Religion

Millions of us who sampled the psychedelics in the 1960s experienced profound, life-changing spiritual and philosophical revelations that were of incomparable personal value. These experiences paralleled discoveries made with the aid of sacramental vegetable products by indigenous peoples from all parts of the world since ancient times—discoveries that are enshrined in the sacred scriptures and spiritual traditions of many of the world's religions.

The "legal" persecution of those of us who freely choose to follow this ancient and honorable spiritual path—the yoga of light-containing herbs—is ethically indistinguishable from the persecution of witches and heretics, or the persecution of early Christians by the Roman state.

Whether or not the use of sacramental vegetable products meets with the approval of the civil authorities—or anyone else—it is a personal matter that clearly deserves the protection of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which promises that the "free exercise of religion" will not be abridged.

In my own experience, the vistas opened up by LSD and the other psychedelics were among the most interesting and important events of my life. Under the spell of these elixirs of light, I was filled with a

sudden, overwhelming reawakening of the quality of consciousness that I remembered experiencing as a young child—yet with the addition of a fully functioning rational intellect. The fundamental questions of philosophy suddenly emerged from the dusty academic realm and assumed a living immediacy: Who am I? What is this reality, this thing we call "life"? How did this universe come to be? And what does this mean, to "be"?

And following on the heels of these questions came answers, flooding forth from within me and from everywhere I looked in the world around me. A transcendental understanding flowered in ecstasy; the scales fell from my eyes and the mysteries of Nature were revealed like an unsealed book in the clear light of the awakened Gnosis. The insights of Eastern philosophy and Western mysticism, of William Blake and Vincent Van Gogh, were unlocked with a spontaneous revelation of their relevance to the collective human condition. I felt renewed, reborn in the purging brilliance of the revelation.

The power that gave birth to this revelation lies latent within us all, locked within the cells of our bodies, in the molecules of the matter that makes up the matrix of reality, awaiting the chemical keys that will release it into conscious awareness.

This is not to say that the use of psychedelics is the *only* way to release this transcendental understanding. But it certainly is *one* way—a way that works.

Repeal Prohibition Now

Prohibition laws are an encroachment by government into the most sacred areas of individual liberty and personal privacy.

Prohibition enforcement relies on the basest malignancies of human nature, rewarding the treachery and deceit of paid informants and the lies and deceptions of undercover agents, encouraging children to spy on their parents and citizens on their neighbors, turning public life into a miasma of hypocrisy and paranoia.

Already, prohibition is bringing American society closer to a total police state, with mandatory urine testing at our places of employment, police roadblocks on our highways, electronic surveillance of our public and private lives, and the maintenance of detailed secret police files on every citizen.

Thomas Jefferson ("life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness") and Patrick Henry ("give me liberty or give me death") must be squirming and writhing in their graves as they look back on their progeny of two centuries.

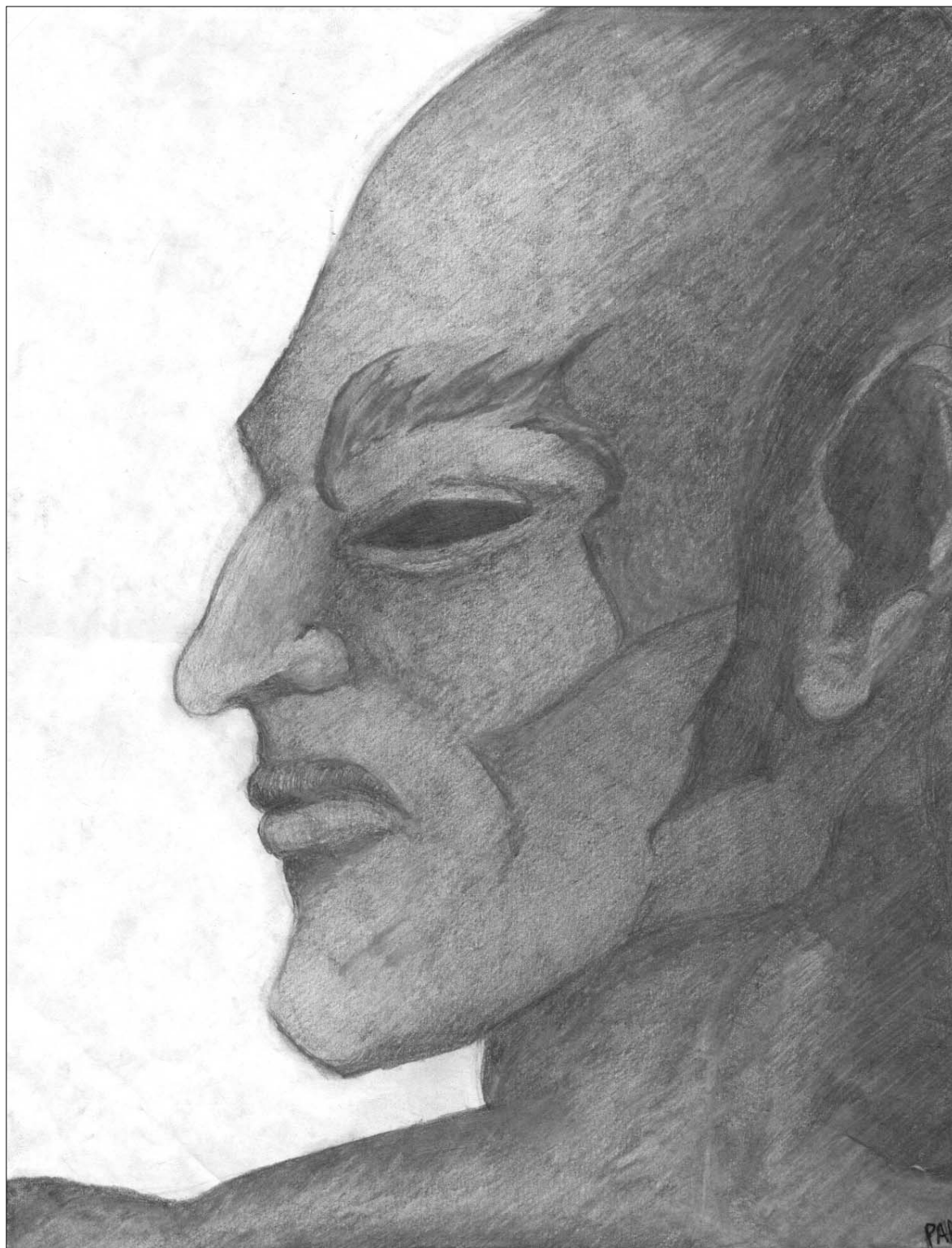
I appeal to all who read these words: *The use and exchange of visionary vegetable products is not a crime!*

Demand an immediate end to all prohibition laws!

Demand that all prisoners of prohibition be freed under a general amnesty, and that reparations be paid for their forfeited property, lost livelihood, and disrupted lives!

Organize and act to stop this mad Juggernaut of misguided government called prohibition—before it succeeds in crushing out the flame of Liberty from the face of the Earth

So must it be!



Untitled
Patty Kisluk
pencil

Letter: Jim Burke III

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

The State of the World, Part One

[May 19, 2001
West Hartford, CT]

Dear Ray,

So “there once was a note, pure and easy, playin’ so free like a breath rippling by.” And “whatever happened to all that lovely hippy shit?” The first quote from Pete Townshend suggests what this grandmaster of rock and roll was searching for in the sixties, and the second what seemed the result thirty years later. He goes on to say it’s all lies, games, deceit, and asks: what happened to the truth? I believe that the more enlightened members of our culture, such as those who attend Jellicle Guild meetings, are very aware of alternative routes to the truth. Money and technology may ultimately lead to the truth. The premise of capitalism, after all is said and done, asserts that the wealthier members of society will re-invest their assets. These assets will trickle down to the less fortunate, at least *in theory*. Medical technology will eventually discover the truth, the key to many locked doors— such as the cure for cancer, unlimited life, the way to prevent birth defects, etc.— through manipulation of cells on a micro-genetic level, *in theory*. This may or may not occur in our lifetimes, but probably not. The ideas that have been put forth by our “government” to promote greater diversity and opportunity have not worked because corporations running this planet cannot let go of their propensity for greed. So much for the truth via capitalism and technology. This is, in a nutshell, my argument for a society based on truth which I alluded to in my first state of the world essay about six years ago. The present state of the world is one of overall anarchy, as measured by the descending lack of truth that surrounds us.

The revolutions have begun as evidenced by the violence taking place at the economic summit in Canada. I have never advocated violence—Ghandism non-violent resistance seems to fit my shoe with a perfect size 11. However, this is a moment to

reflect on what will instigate change, or prevent it. Wars throughout this (and other) country's history took place for self-preservation. People know that the separation of haves and have-nots will grow wider if trade barriers are lifted, etc. The most annoying question that national leaders have to consider is: who will do the work? How can one reflect upon the truth when working in an environment that robs the soul of spiritual energy so blatantly? The technology that has amassed during the last decade cannot replace the truth. This is not to imply that religion can lead to the truth, although spiritual revelation can certainly be used as a non-violent tool to live the truth.

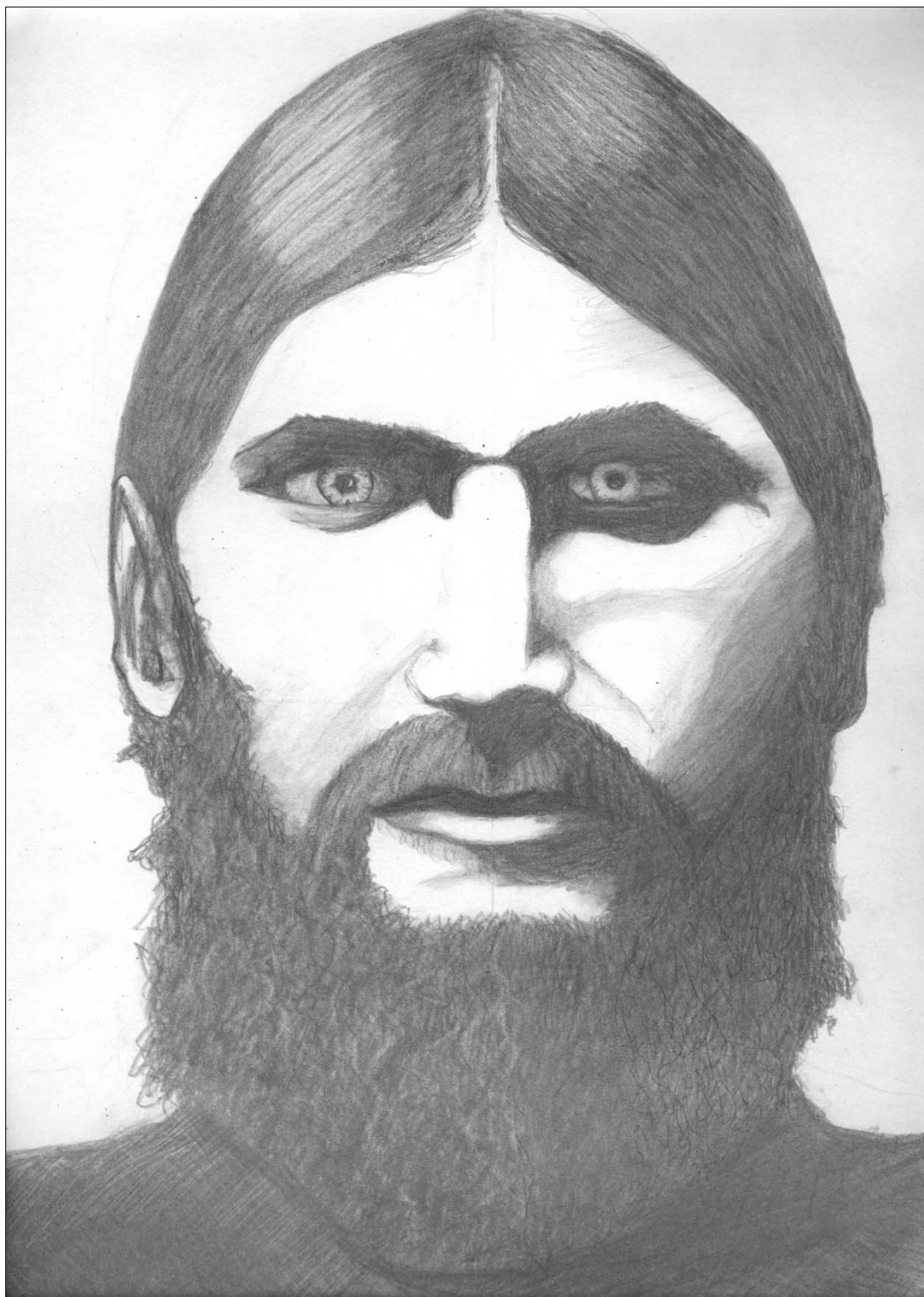
We live on a planet with finite resources and our government wants to build more nuclear reactors. Everything around us is made up of vibrations, even inanimate objects. The speed of these vibrations determine the density of the physical matter in question. Also, the degree of consciousness can alter the speed of molecular vibrations at any given moment. The truth can be revealed when these vibrations are slowed down and/or interrupted. This can be done through meditation or the use of psychedelic substances, such as LSD. But a society turned on to this type of spiritual *self*-guidance would be a culture turned off to Wall Street, as stated so eloquently by Donald Pichaske in his book, *A Generation in Motion: Popular Music and Culture in the Sixties*. This explains the recent beginnings of the new economic revolution. People recognize that the State of the World is like a straight pretzel already baked. It is filled with a conundrum of ingredients that are added to the recipe after the damage is done. The pretzel is condemned to an unwanted shape. In either shape it will crack when eaten. Building more reactors will only compound the energy problem. The use of more of this planet's resources to expend energy more efficiently is the same as the deformed pretzel—it will result in ultimate chaos.

Another issue that will not resolve are the Middle East Wars. Israel, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran are all intent on blowing each other up because they each believe that God is on *their* side. There are so many cross-cultural differences between this country and those in the Middle East that another essay could be written on this subject alone. What transcends these differences, however, is that the Middle East is an example of what happens when religion, technological greed (oil!), and capitalism combine to create spiritual decadence. The truth is nowhere to be found because no one looks for it. A nuclear confrontation is inevitable in this area, but the truth will exist.

The State of the World is Truth and it cannot be destroyed! The Truth will remain—The Truth is—The Truth is Life—The Truth as we understand it—is Life and Death.

We must throw aside aspirations and accept what we have—an opportunity to slow things down and discover WHAT WAS MEANT TO BE DISCOVERED—THE TRUTH—THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH!

[Part Two to follow]



Rasputin
Patty Kisluk
pencil

Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He recently finished up a stint as MC of the BookMarkit open-mic poetry reading in Melrose, MA, helping that yuppie scumfuck town boogie down if only for a little while ;)

Barbara Brannon lives in Columbia, South Carolina. Her art & design work appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Special props to her for picking up my sorry laid-off-from-Harvard-ass & getting me some work to keep on goin' ☺

Jim Burke III lives in West Hartford, Connecticut. His letters appear from time to time in *The Cenacle*. Wherever I am that the subject of 'real hippies' comes up, I cite Burke as the most authentic hippy I know ☺

Joe Ciccone lives in Brighton, Massachusetts. For now. Then he is off to rucksack 'round Europe, & thereafter down to the wilds of Jersey to study medicine & further his folkie/poet aspirations in Greenwich Village.

G.C. Dillon lives in Plainville, Connecticut. His fiction appears occasionally in *The Cenacle* (& online at www.quantummuse.com), & is always welcome. Cheers on your new story, Dillon! ;)

Ralph H. Emerson lives in South Glastonbury, Connecticut. His fiction, prose, & artwork appears occasionally in *The Cenacle*. His new piece is of a series that he has published in other periodicals, and also read at Jellicle Literary Guild meetings.

Dale R. Gowin hosts The Church of Gnostic Luminism website at www.luminist.org. This site features his writings, psychedelic archives, proposals for his new Church, and other works.

Mark Shorette lives in Plainville, Connecticut. His writing has appeared in many issues of *The Cenacle*. His piece in the current issue was an commissioned piece as I knew that he has been reading much Thoreau lately.

Ray Soulard, Jr. lives in Malden, Massachusetts. Somewhat employed these days, thanks to Brannon, I am up til dawn every night and sleep til the afternoon. There are poems of mine in this issue just finished in the last 18 hours. Underground publishing is magically delicious ;)

web: www.burningman.com

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Black Rock Desert
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Nevada
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for more
information:

**P.O. Box 884688
San Francisco,
CA 94188**

phone:
415-TO-FLAME



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**CAN YOU PASS
THE ACID TEST ?**