

Rodin, The Kiss  
Tate Modern

*It's not like the angels  
Could truly look down  
Stir up the trappings  
And light on the ground.  
Remind us of what, when,  
Why or who?*

*The how's up to us, me and you  
And now is greater than the whole  
Of the past  
Is greater and now she knows that.*

R.E.M.,  
"She Just Wants to Be,"  
2001.

*Editor's Introduction:*

Here is the third in a series of books created to promote the writers & artists for Scriptor Press, their ideas & ideals. Each volume is intended to exist independently of other publications, & seeks the traveling comforts of a knapsack or the shadows beneath a friendly tree.

Read, enjoy, pass it along when you've supped your fill.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized monogram 'R&P' above the name 'Raymond Soulard, Jr.' written in a cursive script.

Raymond Soulard, Jr.  
Editor & Publisher  
31 August 2004

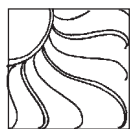
*Scriptor Press Sampler*  
*Number 3 | 2001 Annual*

Poetry: Ric Amante

POETRY	
by Ric Amante.....	5
ACES & EIGHTS	
by G.C. Dillon.....	11
6 x 36 NOCTURNES	
by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (☉).....	29
STATE OF THE WORLD, PART ONE	
by Jim Burke III.....	47
POETRY	
by Joe Ciccone.....	51
HENRY DAVID THOREAU: A MAN OF THE AMERICAN COUNTERCULTURE	
by Mark Shorette (*MLS*).....	55

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SCRIPTOR PRESS  
2001

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.

Fiction: G.C. Dillon

## ACES AND EIGHTS

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

—Henry David Thoreau, 1854

*That last, sharp turn of the maglev overturned your briefcase. Yes, that's better — wedged between your leg and the plastic ergonomic seat. You return to your crumpled newsfax. You peruse the advice column, not finding anything interesting. You ignore the daily affirmation and the political cartoon. You begin to read of the construction lobby's attempts to suppress an environmental impact study on Savage Point's Barking Spider habitat. Then she enters the car. She walks directly past you and assumes the final seat in the train: the one facing to the rear. She sticks her left foot up against the wall and stares out the window. The car is dark except for your inadequate reading lamp. What illumination is present seems drawn into her. She dresses in black: high black boots, black tights, long black tunic. Most of all you notice the leather jacket. An ancient brass buckle hangs on a short strap. You notice a lone chain inching up her right arm. She's not all dark — Caucasoid, her hair is blonde. Short, it rests upon the crest of her jacket. A contrast, a yellow yang to the jacket's yin. She turns. Seeing you. Not seeing you. She turns back to the swiftly passing darkness beyond the window's steelglass. At the next stop, a brace of Regular warriors board the train. They also wear leather, tho' theirs are dirty and stained. Greasy manes fall about their shoulders. They make a comment as they pass her. One bends, putting his ugly face near hers. She looks up and gutturals, "Chour el Varpas!" The Regular's face contorts. His purple lips*

*part to reveal filed-sharp canines. His comrades guffaw and tug on his shoulder. You relax in your seat. You hadn't noticed how tense you'd become. She looks your way again. Then back. She stares at her boots now. She casts a spell of aloneness. A spell even Regulans are powerless against. She conjures herself an island cut off from the continent of humanity. Even the seas surrounding her are infested with sharks, and Kraken, and Arcturian eels of her own devising. You hold your fax up to your face to block out the harshness of her walls, the boiling oil set to spill from her turrets. She gets off at the next stop. She stands. Shorter than you'd imagined. She holds the rail, waiting for the maglev train to set down as its electromagnetic cushion is extinguished. You glance up. She's looking down at you. She smiles and is gone.*

*The maglev moves on into the night.*

\*\*\*

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

Soho was a ragged collection of odd buildings inhabited by ethnic shops, ill-lit bars, art galleries, and cheap flophouses for artists, students, and other eccentrics. It was in Soho that Rosoff maintained her planetside domicile. She was the first officer of a space freighter. The

*Non Sequitur* was currently in synchronous orbit about Peregrine's outer moon.

She punched her access number into the apartment house's computerized concierge. The lobby beyond the doorway was small and dark. A few hardback chairs comprised a haphazard decor. Rosoff barely noticed this as she passed to the lift. She owned the condo on the sixth floor; it was a tax investment, or so her cousin Isaac

maintained. She spent barely four of Peregrine's ten months in the condo; most of her time she was in space or on some far-off planet like Bellatrix, Canopus IV, Gaeltacht, or even Earth. She had a roommate who she rarely saw. Tracey Labardia was a steward on one of the big starliners—The Astral Queen, or something equally pretentious.

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

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

\*\*\*

From the personal correspondence of Ian Palmer:

11 June 2133  
Peregrine  
10-A-9 by E-0-0-6

Dearest Brigit,

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

\*\*\*

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

A four-foot-tall crewmember came hopping toward her. He was named Karazagrip. He was a monopod from a planet in the constellation of Bootes. His people were titular allies of Earth through the Protocols of Arcturus. The alien was bald with small pointed ears.

He dragged a clumsy instrument over his shoulder. Nonchalantly, he thrust it into Izzy's MMU decontamination filter. Photons pulsated through a transparent conduit, zapping away pollutants.

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

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

"Extravehicular the captain is."

"Why is Church in space?"

"His Mjolnir. Testing it he is."

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

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

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

"The bridge he is on."

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

"See-ya, Short Stuff."

\*\*\*

"Watch your yaw," was the first thing Izzy Rosoff heard as she entered the

*NS's* bridge. "Another two degrees starboard, Captain." The voice belonged to the ship's EVA specialist, Mustafa Ali Mustafa. The Syrian officer was seated at the Scanner console. A screen before him only contained a red dot. It was set for holographic display directly upon his retinas.

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

Rosoff typed in her ID code to activate the Helm console. A sensor searched out her eyes and calibrated the heads-up display to form at her height and location. If she turned her head, the image would fade to translucency. She set the controls to mirror Mustafa's

display. She saw an ugly spaceship and scrolling information. This was Captain Sunghai's Mjolnir. A wave of her hand dispelled the hologram.

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

"What's up?" she asked.

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

"No." She shook her head. "I mean with the Captain."

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

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

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

\*\*\*

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

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

reach an Earthbound observer, so the meaning sped ineluctably across the narrow confines of her universe.

Rosoff looked about the observation dome. She normally came here to think.

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

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

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

*Rosoff ran her hand through her hair as the Captain ran through the Inskarchin fears. Seven ships had disappeared mysteriously in the last few weeks. Pirates had been suggested . . . some pedestrian evil was hoped to be the villainy. Speculation increased when a broken staff had been found*

on a distant asteroid. It was an Inskarchin cudgel, an instrument used to obtain labor from human slaves. Izzy's chest constricted when it was mentioned. Her breath shortened. She, herself of fifteen years ago, had been a captive, the subject of the cudgel's harsh blows. Bruises, long ago faded, pained her. "It could all be nothing," Sunghai said, but his face betrayed his true feelings.

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

The door to the dome cycled open. Second Mate Ian Palmer stood there. He stared a moment, then said, "We're on an indefinite hold. The

C.S. Doberienner spaced in-system six light-hours from Peregrine. All civilian traffic has been ordered to wait until she arrives." Palmer paused, a smile spreading across his face. "Want to visit Walter in the meantime?"

\*\*\*

From the personal correspondence of Ian Palmer:

We have taken the Earth for granted. We feel she has always been there and always shall. Earth is like a watchful mother. Colonists find a hostile stepmother waiting for them, rolling pin in one hand, hearty bread in the other. Newly-found worlds are not so patient, loving and charitable as our true mother. These planets must be tamed,

like the Badenveld government is doing, cajoled, as on Gaeltacht, or made a pacific accord with, Sigma Colony, for example. I have first hand knowledge of all this. I have been poisoned by the Rechabite fruit of New Carmel and bitten by an Augean isopod. I have swam in orange oceans and trekked across deserts devoid even of oxygen.

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

\*\*\*

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

"Kazinski, where are you?" Izzy shouted.

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

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

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

"We're hoping to get some of the good stuff," Rosoff demanded.

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

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

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

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

Walter sallied over to his workbench. Rosoff grabbed for the bottle. She took an equally long drink and passed it to Palmer. He wiped the bottle’s mouth thoroughly with his sleeve before taking his own sip. Walter waved frantically for his bottle.

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

“That’s correct,” Palmer replied.

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

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

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

Rosoff fixed him with a lethiferous stare. “I’ll do a delta v that’ll make you spill your drink.”

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

Izzy leaned forward, taking a deep breath. “From what I’ve seen, most men—”

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

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

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

Walter rocked slowly back and forth, his hands behind his shiny head. “Ah reck’n youse mean them civies so feared o’ bug eyed monsters, thay’r ready to bend over an kiss thay’r arse goodbah.” Kazinski leaned forward and folded his massive hands on the desktop.

“Mankind—and womankind too, Isadora—ben seeing na’htmare in the sky since they all come up with the concept of Civ-ee-li-zashun. Thar wuz chariots of th’ gods, Master of the World airships, even cow-killin’, crop-crushin’, folk-filchin’ UFOs.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ian didn’t say.

\*\*\*

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

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

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

The captain's door opened to reveal First Mate Rosoff. Izzy entered the room and commandeered a spare chair. "Hi Fernie. øQue pasa?>>

Maria thought to herself: Est‡ cuete.

<<Nada, blondita. øY t' ?>>

—Is tuisce deoch na sceal, Izzy replied.

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

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

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

"Sure," she replied, folding her arms across her chest.

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

"I'm not interested in flying your space fighter."

"We have only three qualified pilots aboard and each of us

would be grounded in a second by any flight officer worth his bars. I need you to up your hours."

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

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

"The *Mjolnir* can't jump! The pilot would be stranded."

"Yes." Sunghai sighed.

"Divine Wind," Izzy mumbled.

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

"I have a Birmingham blaster I sleep with beneath my pillow."

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

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

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

Rosoff

ran her hand through her hair. †"The duration of your paranoia, you mean."

"The Inskarchin are not to be taken lightly."

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

"But, Izzy, that's what people do all the time. They just give their irrational fears different names at different times in their lives."

"You just don't understand." Izzy lowered her head dejectedly.

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

"You! A gunner's mate?" she exclaimed, pointing her index finger.

"It wasn't much of a job. Ol' *Eccles*, she had only a forward 20 ≈ particle beam cannon and a single rack of rear-launching torps." He

turned off his monitor, pulled open a desk drawer, and removed an enormous meerschaum pipe. As he loaded the pipe with a goodly amount of Beta Lyrae shag, he mused, “She was a fast ship, a thin-skinned schooner that could outrace any hulk put against her.”

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

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

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

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

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From the personal correspondence of Ian Palmer:

Sis, I know you worry about my career. Here I am on a small freighter. I chose to not up in the Armada or to apply for a shiny suit on a big luxury cruiser. I could easily have gotten a posting at a research station. But I like it here. I am learning a lot here I could not learn elsewhere. Capt. Sunghai has been a Spacer for thirty years. Crewman Kazinski is like no one I have ever met on any other ship. He has taken me under his wing. He hopes to put back all the vices Da beat out of

me. And Izzy. I don’t think there is another woman like her in the entire universe (Or, at least Ma should pray so). We’ve spent a lot of the past months together. (She sends you her best and says your last beau sounds like a genuine crawford!)

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

\*\*\*

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

If the blood does not dry,  
It will seep into our root cellars.  
And we needs to forgive  
More than we need to be forgiven.  
It is the same for our forebears and their forebears

Back—back—back to a time  
When the wolf would nip at a mother's crib  
And the night was a blinding net cast by our foes.

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

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

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

\*\*\*

From the personal correspondence of Ian Palmer:

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

*Your loving brother,  
Ian*

\*\*\*

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

“How are you acclimating to sobriety?” she teased.

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

“—to dull the pain of hauling the ropes at the fore all call,”

Izzy interrupted.

“You've heard this before?”

“A hundred thousand times.” She laughed. †“Did he start to sing ‘Whisky Johnny?’”

“Ms Rosoff,” called her Captain.

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

“Main thruster burn in fifteen minutes . . . mark!”

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

“Affer,” Ian confirmed before moving toward the Comm panel.

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

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

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

G.C. Dillon  
April 2001



POETRY: RAYMOND SOULARD, JR.

*for eleni, October 2000*

To begin again, to begin continuously, to learn  
how to see full moon always, ocean dawn always,  
newly fecund dance always, the moment when  
dancstep becomes amour always, begin  
again, begin continuously, break open  
the egg of laughter, how it spatters over woe!

Will you share your music with me tonight,  
new love? If tonight we have but fancies  
of each other, joyful clippings extracted  
from within our hearts' sadnesses, is  
this to you sufficient to architect a  
new beginning? What is love?

Flames of intent, sent by music's wide  
invisible road, kisses resembling phrases,  
smiles bouncing off the full moon,  
a hand touches another hand through  
machinery, did your heart really  
jump? Did mine? What is love?

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer  
a dream at all. Begin again, begin  
continuously. Neither awake nor dreaming.

This universe a mist, a light, a shimmer.  
Neither dream nor awake. Sometimes a  
yes-voyage, sometimes a no-voyage.  
Full moon always. Ocean dawn always.  
We must be dreaming. We must be awake.  
We must be beginning. What is love?

Remember you are beautiful. Begin  
here. Starry skies ecstatic, blue moods  
rising, remember: it's all good: you are  
beautiful. Begin here, return to  
your beauty always in the blue-black  
midnight of doubt. Remember. Begin here.

Your beauty a new language, a glory rising, full moon  
always, ocean dawn always, allow yourself to  
be well, at ease, shine: remember.  
Shine: you are ready. Release what is  
overcast. Choose to be clear. Know beyond awake  
the love of your dreams. Mist, light, shimmer.

Begin again, begin continuously. Beyond  
awake & dreaming. What is love? I'll follow  
you & learn. What is love? You'll follow me & learn.

Begin again, again, & rightly call any beginning  
a miracle. Touch me with beauty,  
I'll tap you with balance, together we'll  
harness pain to hurl our flight from  
dream & awake to meaning & truth,  
maybe a love the wisest trees praise,  
perhaps clarity which does not break.

*For Erika, my mate, my muse*

Evening. Symbiosis. She drips blue wax,  
a quarter century, press perception,  
learn how to see through carnal blindness,  
she smolders with the hidden heat of  
empty space, see with touch toward her  
truth, the rampage in her glance, play  
her power, revolve, evolve, fecundity this  
universe's first & best bomb, all else  
knowable only by preachers versed in texts  
of water, learn how to see through carnal  
blindness, see with taste her tapping grief,  
feed upon this grief, become this grief as  
thus you were conceived & borne, a thread  
untwined from her music, unsentimental  
seed become kindless fire, a freak, you  
abandoned her for a festival years away,  
you, squalls & useless limbs then, but  
already a weed by religion, fancy, vocation,  
passion, furious with your existence, how to  
love, how to love, how to love, & why.

The tribe is gathering on a golden hill,  
a primal blaze, a stout mirror, chimes of trees,  
arrive seeking the wild music, shivers & starlight,  
begin in the mystery of everything, rose  
tower dusk, onyx flow midst sparks of  
dancing, begin in the mystery  
of everything, excess of beauty, residua  
of explanation. Evening. Symbiosis.  
Find a face, together smoke a dream,  
immolate, break down, release, rage  
til the midnight seduces to cessation, yes,  
learn how to see through carnal blindness,  
marijuana, opium, peyote, eat a virgin,  
feed her what remains, LSD-25, ha ha ha,  
trickedya! Wilder music, the beginnings  
of a new freedom, to reinvent the world  
you must begin everywhere & nowhere, this  
universe a jest, a flight, a shimmy,  
the tribe is leaving the golden hill, push on  
toward the fest, bullets & blood, breast & blindness.

All is maya. Illusion. Art. Play. Perhaps.  
Everything ends, & a beat, & all begins again,  
miracle. To play one true note. To learn  
how. Far now from burbling sunshine  
& nowhere near wet willing clarity. All alone.  
All suffering. Yes. Everything ends, & a  
beat, & all begins again, miracle.  
Awake to one missing eye, relieved,  
there is no answer. All alone. All suffering.  
yes. The past bristles hotly, the future  
peddles maps & trinkets. Nights alone  
intimate Her soft sound, her breathing,  
so away with the preacher's boo-toy & pah!  
to the scientist's study rag, glints of  
Her face in dreams, in texts of water  
years deep yet, the blue candle one night  
in the nearly-forgotten dwelling, & nearly  
see within it the way into carnal blindness,  
how to accept, nod, release, nearly there,  
but all is grief still. Laughter. More wine.

A life's anguish. An apex. A dream. No home yet but your blood & hers in depthless agony, a shattered alphabet, strums of kiss, rhythms of twine, nearly disappearing, damned near nearly, study the stars when she is gone for messages she knew not how to leave. Strip down. Decide. Safety or symbiosis? Freak or citizen? Mystery or newsprint? Look to the man who makes butterflies from fire & pain. Dream of the girl who sings from texts of water. 'All is Family' he scrawls in your private book. 'All is Beauty' you write below his, watching her dance, a garden, at first, eventually the sea, til a nebula bright, at last a strandsy dream, every tree's sermon when visited at pink & gold sunset by sacred elixir, full moon always, turn on, tune in, drop out.

Recover sight at last & discover yourself alone in the world. All alone. All suffering. Yes. Yet something from the past careens on, still hungering for a crevice of treasure, a secret burning city of bliss, symbiosis of heart blood & bone, pending culmination. No belief in god or goddess, flow & stagger blindly, refuse to disappear along the path home, disavow nothing, more ferociously with limbs of light, learning finally to play one true note, from dreams of death, approaching the festival at last, bringing words scrawled on leaves of mud, gone now the erotic ladders to nowhere, gone, all gone, come now to the old language of fire, neural myths, beyond maya, no truths, no longer a dream, joy! Fucking joy!

Drip the wax along her back, pools  
of warm hope, shapely stains of grief  
& bliss, freakish rhymes on her shoulder  
blades, the final lines of your private  
book, she whispers 'more,' but now you  
are tongue & tappings, a dozen kisses,  
a dozen more, an extra, a few, &  
the festival grins back at you, &  
all your life's choices burn on that  
golden hill, 'All is Family,' you say, 'All  
is Beauty,' she nods, & she reads to you  
from your private book. All alone.  
All suffering. Yes. Everything ends, & a  
beat, & all begins again. There is  
no answer. She smiles at you though you  
don't know how. You smile at her &  
begin to listen. The world no longer shadow,  
no longer blue fancy. Happiness without limits.  
Morning. Resurrection. Morning. Desire.  
Slim lashes of flame. The least thought matters.

*Parting, loss*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*A Letter on Love for Leni*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*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.

*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.

## 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 ask what happened to the truth? I believe that the more enlightened members of our culture, such as those that 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 sole 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!





## POETRY: JOE CICCONE

### Skeleton Key

there was always smoke. . . the color orange. . . much sunlight . . . as  
i turned through imaginary rooms like an eye with wings or a thin lens  
alone maneuvering along a greased cable, always looking ahead for  
something magical. . . but i did not lead myself then nor now nor pull  
the word belief from its crumbling box of words to claim it was  
divinity  
guiding me through these frail terrains like pythagoras of whoever the  
hell it was.

no, i made and tacked my own prizes to the wall. . . some stood for  
heroism, others had something to do with beauty. . . beauty like that  
found in the coughs of soot that came from the driving wheels of a  
locomotive at the first turns of a journey. . . in the days of the  
trains.

there were ghosts of course who must have stirred in that rare wood  
amidst the howling as she pulled into town, but i was too frightened to  
open my eyes. . . we dressed in bandit costumes as the night poured in.  
. . . now it is too late. . . the phantoms have all flown. . . and the  
beauty on the screens screams nonsense and even the images of the city  
walls have been scratched away. . . it seems nothing is worth pursuing  
anymore. . . yet with the grace of a phantom myself, still searching, i  
go on.

## Two Storytellers

The turbines are running in the distance  
Going nowhere in the numb morning  
Beneath their sky of mud

In another life life was simpler for me  
Everything knew where to end nothing was punctuated  
I said I can fly my own carpet thank you very much  
And headed out into the hurricane with a ham  
Sandwich and thermos of strong coffee

The bridges burned beneath my feet but I wanted it that way

This was the week of the sickroom  
And a trumpeter's pallor  
He was dying before my eyes the eyes  
Of strangers crowded the trees  
And now I'm smoking butts on the heliport of  
Hackensack University Medical Center  
Wondering when the widow will stop crying and leave

I've locked his stool inside a soldered framework  
As a remnant of what was there before  
For to behold his tale is to realize what we never thought to hear  
In the scarlet hours inside combustible bars

It is what I will be telling you about for some time

And no I don't know if it's worth it or if it will make sense to you  
As he said You can't know  
You will never know  
You die without knowing

## 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.

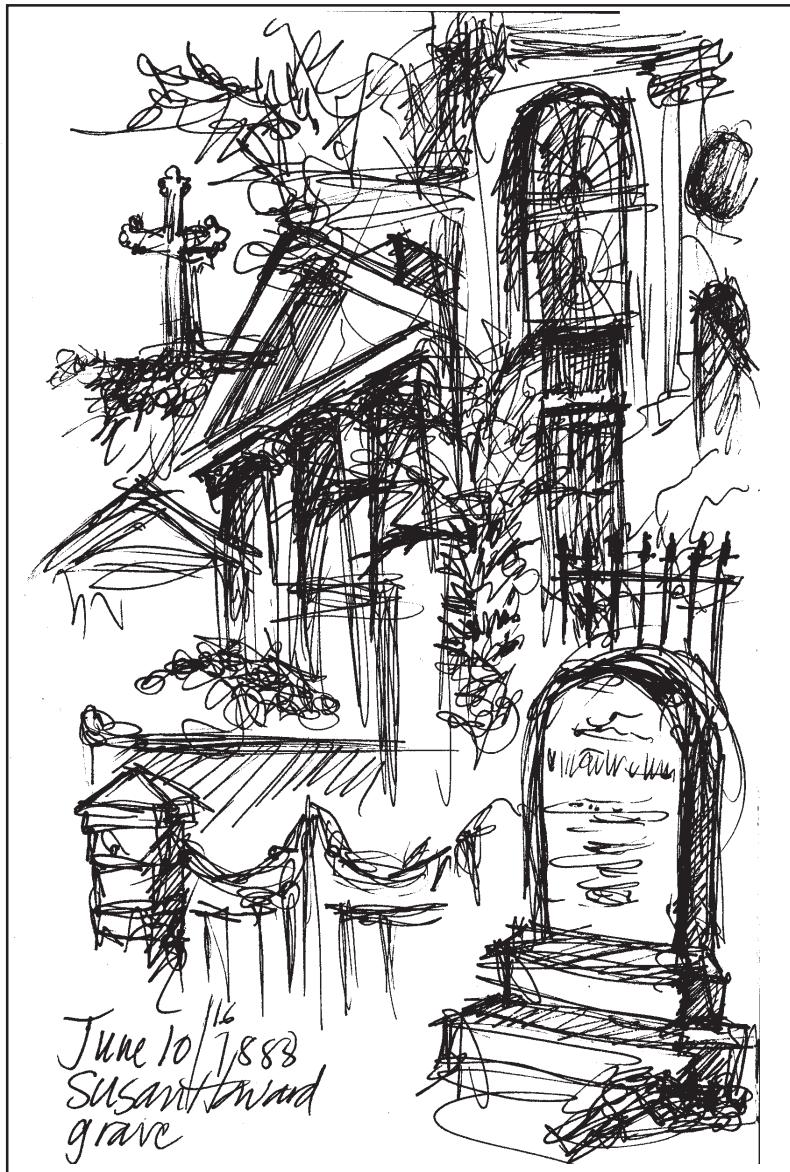
i summon a ride on the last neon locomotive,  
and sail back into the true breach.

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.”*



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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.

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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?*

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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.

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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!*

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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.

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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.*

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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.

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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.*

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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.

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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 had 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\**



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