

ARCHIPELAGO

An International Journal of Literature, the Arts, and Opinion
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X-Ray: CHANDRA
Two Images from Deep Space

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from The Penetralium

Poem: DAVID COOPER
Three Talmudic Tales of Virtue and Vice

Institutional Memory: Reminiscence
LEE GOERNER on publishing ISABEL ALLENDE
KATHERINE McNAMARA: Lee in Retrospect

Poem: ERROL MILLER
Later You May Say How

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Seven Poems in Hebrew and English

Fiction: NORMAN LOCK
The Elephant Hunters

Horticulture: V. DIGITALIS
In the Garden

Endnotes: Folly, Love, St. Augustine

Recommended Reading: *B. Z. Niditch, Randall Jarrell*

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Rachel Eshed's poems in this issue appeared in her second book, HAVTACHOT KATANOT/LITTLE PROMISES, which was published by Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House (Tel Aviv) in 1996 and

which won the AKUM Prize for 1992-93 (AKUM is the Israeli equivalent of ASCAP). She lives in Netanya and her third book of poems SHKUFA B'CHALON/TRANSPARENT AT THE WINDOW is due out in Autumn 1999. Translations of other poems from HAVTACHOT KATANOT have appeared or are forthcoming in *Chelsea*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Feminist Studies*, *Two Lines* and *Confrontation*.

Norman Lock <HNLOCK@aol.com> writes for stage, radio, film, and literary reviews. "Hunting the Elephants" is from a linked collection A HISTORY OF THE IMAGINATION, drawing from the culture and landscape of Theodore Roosevelt's AFRICAN GAME TRAILS (1910). Additional stories have appeared in *Ambit*, *The Cream City Review*, *De Tjidljn*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Lo Straniero N Eeuropa*, *The North American Review*, *The Paris Review*, and elsewhere. He won *The Paris Review's* Aga Kahn Prize in 1979; and is the author of "The House of Correction," voted among the 10 best plays of 1988 and 1994 (for its revival) and "arguably the best new play" of the 1996 Edinburgh Theatre Festival.

Errol Miller <poetry@bayou.com> has been writing and publishing since 1972. His work has appeared in *Verse*, *William & Mary Review*, *Hollins Critic*, *American Poetry Review*, *Four Quarters*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Pannus Index*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Fence*, *First Intensity*, *River City*, *Wisconsin Review*. He was the featured writer in the current issue of *American Jones Magazine*; with the poet Don Hoyt, he won *Spillway Magazine's* 1998 Call And Response Poetry Contest. His "In the Twilight of a Cooler Autumn" appeared in *Archipelago* Vol 3, No. 2.

V. Digitalis <bz2v@virginia.edu>, a book reviewer and an acquisitions editor at a southern press, uses the regular horticulture column "In the Garden" as a showcase for certain misanthropic views and periodic litanies of complaint.

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Emergency Money for Writers

Professional writers and dramatists facing financial emergencies are encouraged to apply for assistance to the Authors League Fund, founded in 1917 and supported with charitable contributions. The writer may apply directly to the Fund, or a friend or relative may apply on behalf of a writer who urgently needs money to pay medical bills, rent, or other living expenses. Though the money is a loan, it is interest-free and there is no pressure to repay it.

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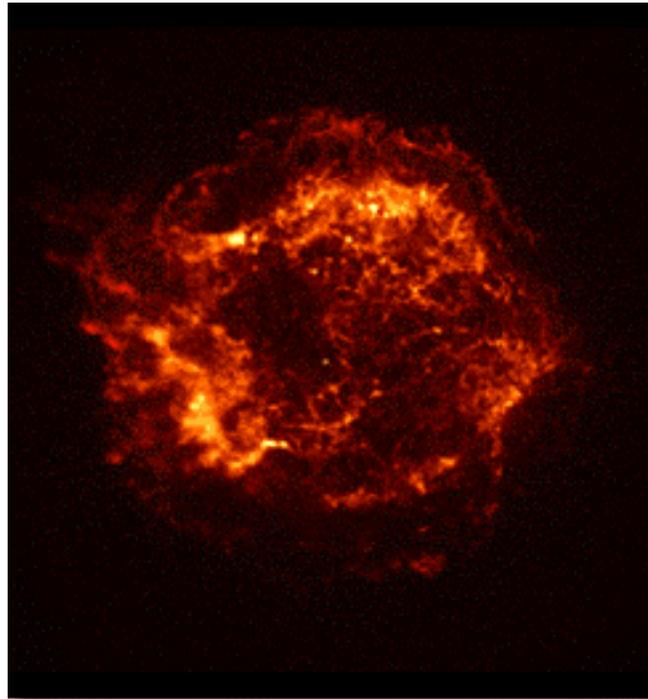
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John Casey, the Contributing Editor who brought Hubert Butler to our attention (Vol. 1, No. 2), is the author of THE HALF-LIFE OF HAPPINESS, just released as a Vintage paperback. The hardbound edition is by Knopf.

Edith Grossman, a Contributing Editor, is the translator of Mayra Montero's THE MESSENGER, published recently by HarperCollins. Montero's first book in English, also translated by Edith Grossman, was IN THE PALM OF DARKNESS.

Our contributor **Robert O'Connell's** novel FAST EDDIE, based on the exploits of Eddie Rickenbacker, was published this summer by Morrow. O'Connell's review of Thomas Pynchon's MASON & DIXON appeared in Vol. 1, No. 3.

CHANDRA X-RAY OBSERVATORY First Images from Space



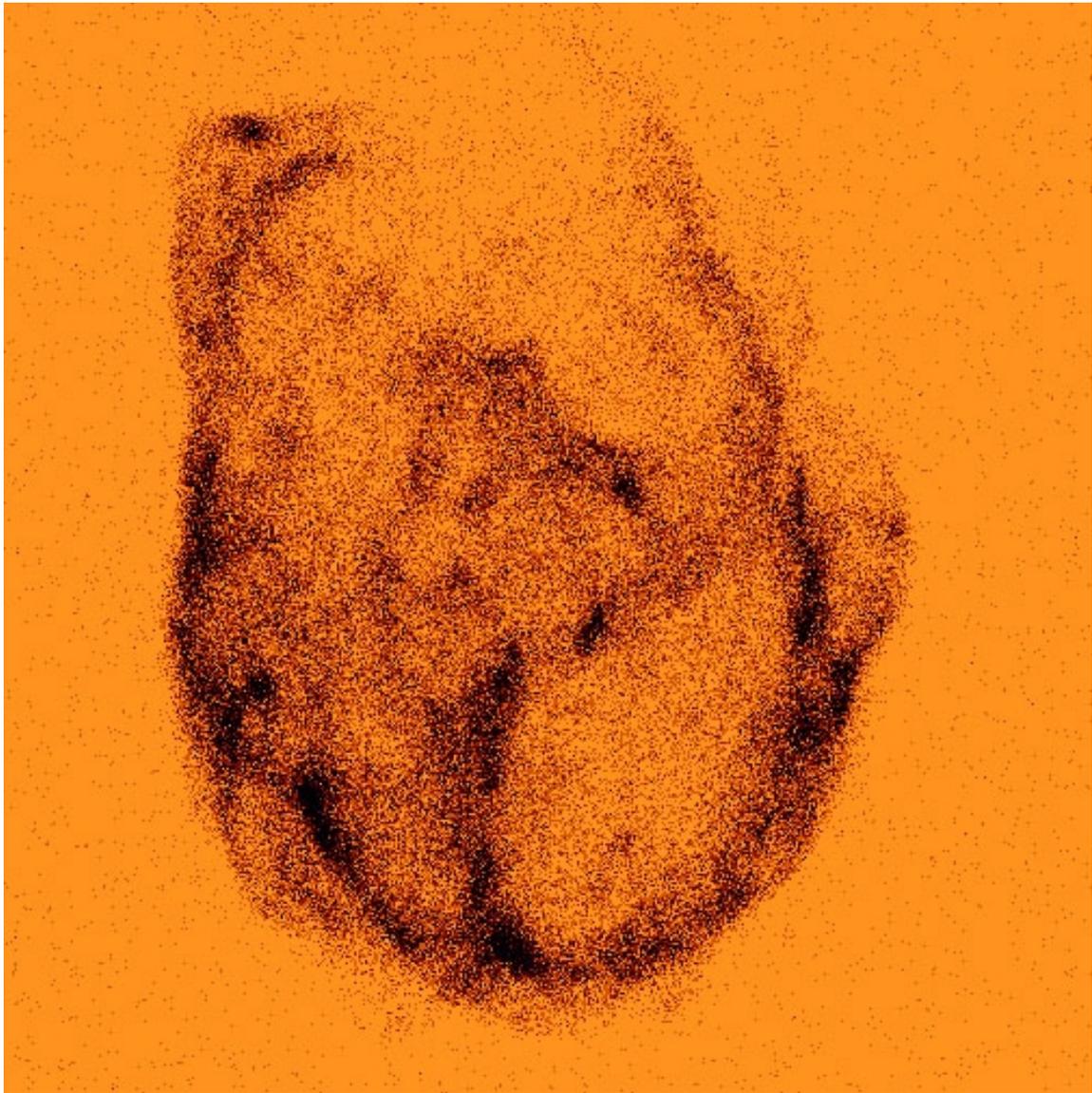
SAO Chandra X-ray Center & NASA

Cassiopeia A, observed August 19, 1999

“Cassiopeia A is the 320-year old remnant of a massive star that exploded. Located on the constellation Cassiopeia, it is 10,000 light years from Earth. The X-ray image shows an expanding shell of hot gas produced by the explosion. The gaseous shell is about 10 light years in diameter, and has a temperature of about 50 million degrees.”

from the Chandra X-Ray Observatory
<<http://xrtpub.harvard.edu/index.html>>

One light year is the distance light travels in a year: 10 trillion kilometers.
The Chandra X-Ray Observatory was launched by NASA July 23, 1999.
It is named for Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar (1910-1995), Nobel Laureate in Physics.
Chandra means “moon” or “luminous” in Sanskrit.



SAO/CXCS/NASA

N132D, observed September 1, 1999

“N132D is the remnant of an exploded star in the large Magellanic Cloud. The Chandra images show a highly-structured remnant, or shell, of 10-million degree gas that is 80 light years across. The remnant is thought to be about 3,000 years old. The Large Magellanic Cloud, a companion galaxy to the Milky Way, is 180,000 light years from Earth. In this image, which is like a photographic ‘negative,’ the X-ray emission is brightest where the image is darkest. This representation shows up some of the best details.”

-from the Chandra X-Ray Observatory
<<http://xrtpub.harvard.edu/index.html>>

from *THE PENETRALIUM*

Peteris Cedrins

20V

Waking with a vague horror of selfhood – as my brain kicks in, I *see* the various gates and plumes and pissy turnstiles of *others*, as if the self were over *there*... slowly, inexorably entering *it*...

Seeing H and O yesterday in the *White Horse*... is it that I don't want to understand what that (was, is) for me – emotionally – what it was, *love*, what it is – *retour*?

I couldn't love anyone then... couldn't understand what you were to me...all I was capable of was exploiting love, she said.

My pockets are full of one-way tickets.

O was drunk, talking about illusion. H gave us each a copy of her recent book of verse. *Oh, yes, illusion*, she inscribed O's copy – *illusion... and then*. O said: see, she still has problems, she still adds an *and then* – that is *her* illusion. (O remains a dogmatic Buddhist.)

The White Horse is a café at the edge of the market. The door says *we await you*. White Bulgarian wine, white chocolate, coffee and cognac after, O drinking mug after mug of cheap local beer.

We got there through the crowded market... I was searching for a converter for a Russian telephone plug, H for tomatoes and potatoes for her son. At first she avoided my eyes... while she was buying blue-eyed potatoes I remarked on this to O – in the café, he pointed this out to her and she looked into my eyes. She has not changed much, the same red hair and huge green irises and skin the hue of unpasteurised milk...

So we sat and talked... she gave me a little kiss, even. I felt... what? Nothing – nothing in the present? Oh, her beauty and brilliance, I suppose... she is *calmer* now... *composed, collected*.

A student of psychology at the University here, living in a small room in the dormitory set aside for students with families.

I can still see the hormonal storms raging underneath, O said. *Be careful, she's a woman, she can still show up at your house and it will all begin again* –

We talked about poetry and erotica (writing smut – she said *it's sad, unhappy people reading the sexual texts of unhappy people*) (and that she is *happy* now – is that true?) (alone?)

(*My Heart Laid Bare*) That use of *woman*. Be careful, she's a woman, she can still show up... Begin again...

Walking in the gloaming to buy peanuts (the old Soviet kind, raw, ill-kept) ... the big split between pedestrians and drivers (the old Soviet dream, a car – when money wouldn't get you an apartment, the car was a desperately developed little world, the ultimate status symbol, the sole private place, like for high school drivers back [the word *home* crossed out]) ...

Craig, who made the averse pentagram of blood silver I wear as amulet, with his expensively tattooed back (the witches' sabbath), was flying to Seattle when an ex-military type sat next to him and asked him *have you ever been in the military*. Craig said nothing, then remembered my story about the barricades in Riga in 1991. *No*, Craig answered the man, *no, but I was on the wall... against the Russians... in Daugavpils*.

Craig would often speak of *making up one's past*. The little girl in Robbe-Grillet's *Project for a Revolution in New York*: “why should I tell the truth, when for every little truth there are millions and millions of lies?”

A week or so ago... in the Quashas' kitchen... we were talking about my old lover (an old lover... (...

Oh, tree. (There are still some ancient poplars along the levee, but Allée Street is no longer an allée...) Oh, tree. Truths, branches, false branches... forms of address.

I still obey RK's dictum *write everything*. Everything as opposed to anything.

The Latvian word *spilgts*. Brilliance, glare. *Spilgts piemērs*, striking example, striking instance. A striking instance. I lay abed softly speaking to my phallus, not two hours ago, not touching myself – wherever lust is – and memory mixed with vision to form... *form* (entrances, pissy turnstiles, gates) – – – *the old life*, images and sometimes even *visions* that had a *demonic* function, arabesques and fatal nativity scenes... your eyes. What does *yours* mean, in this sense?

Address. That I (used to) believe that... I... was... drawn... *out*. I am a different – creature – when I am so drawn. What I say is different when I – it is not *aim*... ... *Give*... When I give of myself.

I am afraid of your history, A said. That was long ago, about two weeks ago, in Cambridgeport. A drove me from Harvard Square to Springfield, I was trying to... *seduce* her?

Fidelity – I lack? “The heart has a chastity the mind might envy.” – RK. I do *not* lack fidelity – but then, what *is* it? Hi old lover. Where are you. Distances, absences. And

then there is this *home* – I think of the Georgian saying: you cannot call yourself a man until you plant a tree, kill a snake, raise a son. Home is planted trees, the sand-thorn next to the fence I built, the apple trees, the cherries. Is watering the garden, guarding the marriage-bed... did I fail, there?

O said: *why don't you look into his eyes?* H answered: *never look a snake in the eyes.*

A swimmer, a man treading water. A man lying in the water. Sinks, bobs, is lapped at, drowned, flies. Oh touch me in a certain way. Certainty, then, perhaps, more than honesty. A man is lying in the water. For every one truth. Narrative, straitening, *Engführung*. The narrative of the man who is drawn out, a picture book, clouds swollen like the hands of addicts, eyes out of focus. A dissolute kindliness o'erspreads her queendom.

You emotional slut, L wrote. Where did you want to take me... alcoholic coma?

The old life – the history of the birch trees (Wehrmacht, 1941), unseasonably warm temperatures immediately before my arrival – now it is *ievu laiks*, the time of the bird-cherry trees, the temperature drops. This is rationally explained in the newspaper. *Meteorologists deny that the bird-cherry trees are to blame for the cold weather.*

He sits and suffers nightmares. There is a man in the water. How deeply he breathes and the weight of his bones. His skin is the color of an iceberg.

The old life, *davai*. I do not lack fidelity. He is drowning in his nightmares.

I am afraid of your history. It is a simple matter. A woman with beautiful hands touches your tailbone or penis, stares into your heart – six years later, she says *I couldn't love anyone, all I could do was use men.* And I came from here. A glaring instance of love.

Very tired, herring marinated, in the gloaming the proliferation of stores, the neighbours hung the flag today 8 May, that is still a difference like Easter, grand political debate as to whether we celebrate the defeat of Fascism on 8 May or 9 May, 9 May when the Germans surrendered to the Soviets, 8 May when the “rest of the world” celebrates it... and there was nothing to celebrate here. Old Peeteris Eermanis poem, how the bells are ringing in Paris and Prague, in London and the Hague, and here no bells rang, here the war ended forty-six years later, if then. If then. *My mother is afraid there will be another war.* “Pepper on your tongue!”

The official unemployment rate in Daugavpils is only slightly above that of the rest of Latvia, yet among those... in the know... it is more like a third of the population. (Disraeli: “There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.”) The numbers are manipulated – who is unemployed? Workers who go to Germany, *Gastarbeiter*?

The old meat processor – the big ugly building across from the closest tram stop – has been turned into a “little market,” confusing hallways lead to tubs full of live carp, dairy counters, here and there an abacus, coffee from Scandinavia, mineral water, necessities, French perfume. The only payphone I have been able to discover anywhere near here.

Oh again again: *TRY ANOTHER WORLD* quoth the billboard in Beneix's film *La Lune dans le Caniveau* – when I came here, I wandered around with my mouth open for at least a month. I was in awe.

A long time ago, A drove me to Springfield on a delightfully vernal day – two weeks ago – and wrestled with her mind, to come or not to come (“our bodies remember what our minds do not even perceive”) –

The throat as a nativity scene, Styrofoam and frescoes, darling... what is want?

The throat as a nativity scene, I stare into your eyes and *see*. Once there was a woman everything she said was a lie. And her lies were so lovely that her suitors rapped at sodden doors in every corner of her queendom, she could turn anyone into a suitor with a bare bout of fixation, yes, and all of it was meant for me like Kafka's door. Again again *quest'ansia di amare*, yes, *the anxious desire for love*. Certain illusions are an amber compote. *Don't be so hard on yourself*.

A long time ago, A drove me to Springfield. Ah Springfield, how I will remember you, a slice of shitty pizza and a beer, Icehouse, and all alone again a bus into the Lake of Albany, headed for Quashastan – fate means that at every significant point in my life of late I head for the same little room above the Tibetan altar in Barrytown and... A drove me, her body wracked by fleshly memory. I desired. Many years later – it is like hearing Orson Welles in a Paul Masson commercial: *we will sell no wine before its time*.

Tu esi zirgâ. You are on horseback. You are on time, you are on top of things, you know where you're at. All around you things swirl and howl, do they not, you know what the fuck you're about, there are no loose ends, it is your heart we are talking about. *The heart of love is certainty*. Limbo dissolves like Klingsor's garden, hide not the wand, your testicles are like a cleft core, touch me, there is no sickness in your eyes.

A fog spreads from her lovely middle finger to her meaningful clitoris, enveloping...

Some time ago, A drove me to Springfield. We had spent a pleasant morning in bed, or it was pleasant for me – what else can I know. Staring at her stunningly beautiful body. What would it be like to stare at such beauty permanently.

A sacrament is something that seizes you. To be spread like this. Outstretched, widespread. Upon arrival, for a month I wandered open-mouthed, in awe. The carp do fishy things in vats, the austere cashier calculates their value on an abacus, the sour cream is very good, the thing sizzles, the gloaming is long, longer, longing.

She was hung over, she had even vomited upon the doorstep the night before, red vomit, burgundy. A pride of lions. A single metallic hair among the keys, in the keyboard...

What right now I most remember of H is an autumnal walk in the park when she took me to see a steel sculpture of a horse (*you are on horseback*). Her hair mixed its hue with the fall of the trees, and her eyes went well with it, and she said *imagine being a*

little girl and coming upon this, this is a place for a child to wander is it not, a child like me.

See I could go, on and on, and never know myself, a shooting star from the throat deep green, fluorescent, *irides*, why I came here...

+ + +

For years we lived in these two rooms, the west side of the house. The tall birches, planted by German troops during the war (that they did such things, planted trees), catch the light in their new leaves.

Love was a transaction, H also said.

On the other side of the room were the Belarussians brought here as forced labour by the Germans. The old woman, in her nineties, known as the old witch. Her daughter and her daughter's children and grandchildren. Their nasty little dog. After much effort of a magical nature, they left – we tore open the wall that concealed the door and broke down the door. I's mother lives on the other side. A maple shades her western rooms. Here, where I am, writing away, the light. Cockcrow. After two years of subtropical swampland, the time of the bird-cherry trees seems bitterly cold, and the sky – it is so different here, pregnant with spirits that are sometimes like the jellyfish I and I handled in the Black Sea, sometimes a mere momentary shift of the attention to something outside time – like looking into the eyes of a little girl who is uncannily *ancient*, obviously not of this world – oh, it was a cloud, or a blackbird, or a blade of grass bending into the wind... And the sky, and what is written there. The man, the swimmer, lifts himself from the pool and sits naked at a round stone table, gazing at a clay plate piled high with grey peas, the local dish, the entire sky his cloak, and the light caresses the crowns of the great lilacs that will soon bloom white, and summer approaches, and summer will be swift, we will build a woodpile, neat and round, the light will grow for several weeks until twilight stretches all the way into the night – then darkness will come again, insufferable, indelible darkness and a winter rife with desperate eyes, other spirits (the call at the market: *spirtyik nye nado*, the gloomy purveyors of corn liquor, *samoganka*, moonshine) find us. It is the main thing here, the light.

+ + +

Severe frost – morning – one of the coldest springs in memory – (local memory, not my memory) – staring into my steaming breath on the way to the outhouse – the vapors of dung from the dry hole – a sliver of light used to enter there at a certain hour, but the pit is now covered with shingles – the Temple of Cloacina – *faek, faek* – I dreamt a country where the extremes of love were invisible to the touch... that the soul, as in S's letter, arrives more slowly, the way a disease is transmitted – during the incubation period the man (the swimmer) dreams monstrous homunculi, mixtures of lovers and cold.

Hands bloodied by shoving split logs into the decrepit furnaces, unwashed because the bathhouse is only open once a week ('tis worse in Krustpils, where the cunning owners of the *banya* have determined that women take a lot longer to bathe and allow them to do so only once a fortnight).

Today, through bribery and des affaires sovietiques, Lattelekom's employees came to install a *rosette*. "I don't want a Russian plug... I need this kind of plug," I said, showing the little modular thingie to the man. "We now do everything according to European standards," he answered, giving me a sidelong glance. "You are not a pure Latvian," he finally said. "Stay here, I'll come back and we'll talk," he said. I felt that I had to explain that I have lived here for some time – prices skyrocket as soon as anyone gets an illusion of foreign money – (my accent has very nearly disappeared, however... the more so since my absence, according to some) – "So why are you here, when everyone is trying to escape?" The Russian *rosette* is backwards, so that even the cheap little converters sold at the market do not work with the extension to my modem. The man – they arrived in a trio, a coarse Russian with vodka on his breath, a mousy man with wire-rimmed glasses who drove away ("are they to walk, the subhumans?") and this rather affable and simultaneously introspective dude from Līksna. But I did not have to answer him; he lifted one of I's bones (the house is full of bones, gypsy skulls with jackdaw skulls balanced in the upturned cranium, a young German soldier, elk, rat, cat, etc., all I's). I went away for a Black Russian, Sobranie, found in Riga at the quarter of what they cost in America, and when I returned he repeated: "You're not a pure Latvian, are you," fondling the bone. "You're an artist, I know." The word *artist* is here still applied to anyone in any of the arts. "Artists live *par hasard*. You can take this bone and turn it into something, I can't." (The Russian meanwhile was disgusted by everything he saw here, as the neighbours once asked what religion we professed, wailing and eating on the floor. "Lutheran," my mother-in-law answered.) "I have no hobby, you know. My wife, she weaves. She makes these things, and I can't see it. But I know how you are." And the man was *joyful*, and I thought about all of the times "artists" and I have acted in an... irregular... way, and how this culture... .. but it immediately sinks into fallacy then, mentality mentality mentality it is the object of obsession here, "folk mentality," "Latvian mentality," etc. One of the actors from the theatre here (the fine one, since replaced by an ensemble more appropriate to whatever constitutes the decimated "Latvian community" – the old theatre performed truly kick-ass stuff, Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, *King Lear*, Faulkner, to an empty and unheated house), throwing up in the bathroom, emerged savagely, crying "we came here to bring you culture!" Did he say that in self-mockery? Tinged with nihilism? Passing the students to get to the computer room, I play "pick the Latvians" – the Russians have a tendency to dress... brazenly, sexily, often in what is to Latvians extremely poor taste. Latvians have a tendency to dress modestly, act demurely, be stand-offish or simply *earthy*, oddly earthy... still the imprint of various *Kulturphilosophen* from Abendland?

So the day, uncertainly. I haven't RK's facility for certainty.

Long ago a dear friend and teacher: "Impregnate or be impregnated." My cousin writes of how irksome it is to be constantly confronted by so-called "magic(k)al ideas" that have their origin only in bad biology.

Uncertain, befogged, beset by doubts. And then I have ideas (airs) about basic decency, as most do, here. Less from strains of moralities than from fundamental Nietzschean thought, eh? The millennia required for a man to say *I will*. “Men loveable men / inviolable in their promises.” (Ken Irby)

I used to think... that I lay with my subconscious self open, head down in the ink-bottle, sobbing. Now and again I have seen myself in flight. Pour an in-flight magazine, turn on the pipe.

+ + +

“You’re not a pure Latvian, are you? Your parents were taken away.”

A hovel, of rusted metal, tar paper, and boards salvaged from the wreck of the *Sympathy*, lay halfway between a freakishly shaped knoll and the sea. Its insides were lit with ice. In it, my ideal reader sat. Her long-lost lover, the saboteur, had been dropped behind enemy lines with nothing but slender bars of bitter chocolate and a map, printed on silk, bearing a simulacrum of this brutal country. My reader wore this map around her breasts, and her skin, the colour of curdled milk, was covered with goose pimples. Her eyes were rock crystal and doom, and uncertainly wrinkled mountains on the threadbare map were tinged with blood. She sat by the black stone, weeping. In one corner of the room, an old gramophone skipped gaily, the disk the colour of split peas. Suddenly the whirling disk flew up and turned a somersault, its underside like smoked salmon, the needle catching a few phrases even as the record flew.

“Your parents were taken away.”

The court of the cloister in Riga (“the fetal gesture in the monastery” Chuck Stein) was the embodiment of an architecture in which it is not permissible (possible) to speak in doorways. The silence is gone now, replaced by a beer garden that blasts crappy music – revenue for the nuns?

Really, my ideal reader wrote more than she read, and spoke what she wrote. Making love to her was like diving into a pool of words. They were different things to her. *Language is speed*, she would say, not referring to methedrine but to the peculiar asthmatic swiftness of thought and hormonal chaos that plagued her. The hovel, containing the lost Amber Room (Yeltsin keeps insisting that he knows where it is, the *Bernsteinzimmer*, of which only photographs remain) and the History of the World, stood on a freakishly shaped knoll, very far from the sea. My reader wore olive drab over her mapped breasts, staring incessantly at an extinct insect trapped in an egg-shaped red stone. If asked, she removed her drab garb and pulled her shoulders back, exposing a distorted country ruled by fishmongers while the men were at sea.

“I am a lonely painter, I live in a box of paints. I’m frightened by the devil, and I’m drawn to those ones that ain’t afraid.” Joni Mitchell, millions of years ago. The high school bus ten minutes away, I drew deeply on a Camel straight and imagined how much better it would be to live in a box of paints and not in a sinister arabesque or drawer full of sharp pen nibs, ball points, broken leads, unfathomable arguments that end with inscapes. *I Dream of djinn*, the narrow neck of an exotic bottle, within are soft

sofa pits in Brueghel orange, all the appurtenances of suburban life, Nemesis. “A *man* needs the *moon* in the *sky of night*,” quoth Duncan McNaughton. Lived oh so many years technically starving. And yet, and so.

“What’s new?” “New? A vodka made with fresh cranberries. It tastes just like fresh cranberries, try it.” The man the salesgirl was answering immediately forked over a couple of *lati* for the cranberry vodka, candy-apple red, and I told her that I needed one, too. It does not taste like fresh cranberries. The high school bus is ten minutes away.

“The geometry was somehow *all wrong*.”

S asks what are metaphors to me, and I was immediately in mind of *things don’t turn into other things*. Not only was the geometry wrong, bus seats sprouted fools’ gold.

+ + +

Today the lilacs blossomed. The sun is sinking behind the Germans’ birch trees, cut tulips on the table, a veritable field of tulips beyond the window, dandelions also blooming (odd how they are so despised in America; besides being pretty, the leaves make an excellent salad). Other flowers I don’t know the English names for. The apple trees I planted already give apples, and are in bloom now, too (it is warmer in the city, and the blossoms appear to have survived). The neighbors’ tulips (their house built on I’s mother’s land). Goats next door. A pastorage.

Border guards strut towards the station, firemen in an ancient fire engine drive slowly out towards Viduspogulyanka, where things are yet more pastoral than here. There are not too many ways out; I suspect this was Soviet intent.

This was my window. I was so often fixed here, even pissing into a jar rather than tear myself away from the work at hand. *It was different then*. L’Autodidacte, among heaps of mouldering books, suffering *the luxury of voluntary exile*, condensing his self, that so often ran amok, into tiny, almost illegible letters in soft graphite on spanking white paper in leather-bound books.

It stank of destiny, really. Lovecraft’s witch character, Keziah, scrawling some strange geometries on the wall of her cell and vanishing.

Whence the terrible mistrust of destiny, how theatrical she is, her talents, *kriyashakti*, a crooked finger touched mine, lighting her cigarette, and the world blew up. L’Autodidacte and poète maudit, self-declared, clinging to the red cliffs of life, hands smeared with birdshit.

Edward Germain on Harry Crosby’s diaries: “They show deep traumas, unresolved Oedipal patterns, great inner violence, and a surprising lack of true self-understanding.”

This was my window then. After some years, I rarely ventured out.

+ + +

I was sitting on the windowsill in the dormitory for students with children, weeping. *That morning... I did not make love to you... I woke at dawn... and the hand of God put me inside you.* We had just made love again – or, I had made love to her, tongued her shivering body, its beauty. *CUNNI CULTRIX, VENTER VENUSTUS.* And the art of love ends, I live in you again, perhaps even unwelcome, perhaps that is why my body hurts, but hurts differently, aches. An inevitability almost eerie. We made love on the floor, her child in the bed above us. Five years old, he has laughter like mine, hysterical, verging on satanic. *Trust me,* she said. And right away, asks commitment, only little commitments, *accompany me on the ferry, I'm afraid and translate me and teach me how to use a computer.* We sat by a filthy pond and smoked the clove cigarettes I gave her, drank wine all night at the *Klondike*, and walked through the early dawn (the light *sweats* in Latvian), hand in hand, and I was again in the presence of such unearthly beauty, *happy* to feel pain, to *feel* again, because it was *feeling* I lost in betraying her, in needing to betray her because she could not be mine. *I woke at dawn and entered you, and the world opened up to me.*

Once there was a woman and everything she said was true, but none of her truths were real. I remember settling the bill at the *Little Sun* – she had taunted me, saying she had paid for the room for several days in advance and would whore herself (“he’d never seen pubic hair trimmed like mine, he’s going to sell me”) – I went downstairs and the clerk said *no, no, the room has not been paid for.* Faced with the deception. But there was very little between her – our – imagination and what was “real,” then. *I woke at dawn and entered you.* And I ran, then, from *dream* and *vision* into *myth.*

L writes: *I miss your depth of feeling about the world and your precision of expression, but that is also what drives me nuts about you. How much am I really to blame for your plunging into despair, and how much of that is your tendency (dare I say, even, your desire?) to do so? Harsh words, maybe, but I'm just talking out the side of my head, as the Brazilians say. I described you to someone recently as being perilously romantic; even if it doesn't fit you, I am proud of it as a little linguistic unit.*

I cannot say what it is that makes me love H so. That she awakens me to the marrow, that I trust her in a way that I trust no one else – I trust her ability to fly with me to that place of bliss (*lemon land, love*) that I secretly envision, that is central to my vision. That I have disappeared before her (*Du – Tristan! Ich – Isolde!*) Sink hernieder Nacht der Liebe usw. I can *see* that she *knows* that place. I have *glimpsed* it with her. And the only bitterness I bear toward her is that I have felt her *refuse* to go there with me – is it that she cannot?

H: *Am I to be a person you love only so that you can write about them later? Later, when I am finished translating the ingredients of an Estonian ice cream, I will let myself proceed to see myself as such, to apply those harsh words? And they aren't true.*

Lemon land, love. Name or describe that place. Name or describe that place I yearn for, beyond a doubt.

On the one hand, she demands to be loved and *nurtured*, even. And I admit it is odd to see that she, too, is even capable of an almost selfless, *healthy* love. For I do not see her as that, as a *mother*. I am beginning to. She said she saw her errors reflected in her child, and corrected them. H has found *earth*, something I have not done, and I told her that I admired it, her newfound inner peace, earth. *Please don't forget how to fly*. She said that she was learning to walk.

And yet. And yet she is more self-absorbed than anyone I have ever known. There are moments, listening to her and looking at her (it is impossible for me to look at her without desire, mostly), when I receive the impression that she is utterly alone in her world – love, for her, is only a form of self-love. At other times, this somehow horrible impression is different – as if this self-love *extends* to others.

But maybe what makes this love so *tragic* for me (“our sense of the tragic waxes and wanes with sensuality”) is that *touching* her, touching her even with my mind – when I can, and for years I couldn't – *destroys me*. I feel a fantastic light sometimes, articulating relations, seeing what appear to be *names and natures*, understanding others. With her, never. I can say nothing about her. The preceding paragraphs make no sense, only obscure (). “The siren's secret is that she is silent.” (Harvey Bialy)

HHHH

Cut lemons on the table, drinking steaming water tinged with lemon juice, lindenflower honey and the brandy *Saturns*, all morning editing translations from Estonian, ignorant of the original, inventing the meaning. I am ill, having apparently contracted an uncommon cold. *A bad cold*. “It threw cold upon the heart.” Waking shivering with cold *and*.

Lemon land, love. The analysand there. The alienist stooped over the various narratives that lay upon the operating table like the bow of a gift that arrives after its sender's death, wave of the dear departed, like a dog without a master (*God's dogs*, the song called wolves), like like like. Don Juan in Hell.

Once, I trusted the master's clarity, but the light in there is a disturbing observer, a luxurious metaphor ruining the twilight of the place, the obscurity of what we shared in the dark of the moon. *And the moon*, she wrote, *the moon is precisely the colour of a crow*.

Purchasing power – that a prostitute in Tallinn is \$40, but runs as high as \$200 in Finland. Is that woman whore or hiatus, a hideous mask worth more behind the starry bastions and converted specificities that guard Helsinki Harbour.

An afternoon plopping chopped potatoes into tiny holes, dropping a dollop of diluted cow dung in beside them, and in late summer there is food for an entire winter, enlivened by mushrooms preserved in salt, a couple of bags of squash seeds from Ontario, surds, gourds, obscure definitions, gone. But every time I come to this

country, the first thing that happens is I get sick. The aubergine roots of that are hidden in the sky. Wake among the veins of it, sky beets gutted capillaries guts, inverted turnips afloat in the White Sea. Go west, young man, and grow up with the wordless. There I met the mystical couple, saw how they had changed, closed now to the intrepid fool, close now. *Occult specificity*.

Desperately cultivating solitude, they deal with things by running away from things, their voices, grandfather clocks, telegrams from lost lovers in dead languages, Morse code... the regions where my brain does not go but swells like an enormous radish, fucked kidneys, “cooked shadows” in Calvados, viddy the end of my life, the secret goddess under tented sheets. Pay no attention, it is only a man looking for himself.

The sickness of the insides being turned inside out, hemorrhoidal rumba, hummingbirds, rhum au babaganoush, Leberkäse (neither liver nor cheese) slur, slobber & I am in the East again, prickly with private culture. Doors fall open, virgins take it up the ass, dawn comes at half past four & students ready themselves for Walpurgisnacht –

a single loveless girl crawling towards love or holding to a loveless lover by the skin of her teeth.

That I am back in Babel, a girl is singing Ipanema, a mural offers *Lower Body Massage* – the East. What do you know about the inside of this potato? Is this an accessible potato? It tastes gross raw, deadly nightshade, blue-eyed or masked. Fine pureed. But do that before cooking and you get glue.

The *World Book Encyclopedia* informed me at an early age that a writer’s first novel is autobiographical, no matter how it is disguised under moss and vermicelli.

+ + +

It is lovely to use the heart again so, even in a hopeless way. It lived in such obscurity.

Reading an old *National Geographic* about this place – wilderness is not wanted here, nature at the hand of man, landscape reflected back, is. Another yellowed clipping, about how everyone interviewed, the *ones taken away*, the deportees, spoke of *liktenis*. The woman conducting the interviews claimed that *fate* is an inadequate translation. That what these people all have in common is *narrative*.

+ + +

In Terrorem

“Manchild, she said, come back to the shores of what you are / come back to the crumbling shores.” – RD

From Adrian Leverkühn, Friday, 4 a.m.:

As I was thinking of you today while I was out climbing I looked down and found a little effigy of a man from a dried little tree trunk. Strange sigil-like patterns adorn it from the worms having eaten designs into him. I picked him up and brought him home to keep you safe.

From Adrian Leverkuhn, Friday, 8 p.m.:

Put the wooden effigy next to me to dream with last night. Had a dream where I was with B and some others and some invisible being started chasing us.

Woke up screaming. Took the little wooden man out of the room. First nightmare I've had in ages. Hope it is nothing too prescient of your present situation or situation to come.

+ + +

A man who has no investments is invested in nothing.

O called. H telephoned him last night, "in heavy hysteria," her child ill, +40C. "There was something about a kiss – and she said to tell you *no*, that she needed me to tell you, that she could not tell you herself. *No* to your request. *No*."

+ + +

L forwarded these remarks from her friend M:

"lately i believe that the concept of romantic love that we are indoctrinated to in our culture inspires a kind of addiction to sex and overwhelming emotionality that allows people to ignore their own pain (this is why it is on the level of addiction) and focus on a different construct of their mind, 'their love'. because people misunderstand the power of their own mind, and fail to take responsibility for their own feelings, they believe that the other person is responsible for making them feel better. often this is such a strong feeling, that the feelee starts to resent the object of their 'love' which has by then become a childish kind of attachment wrapped up in fear that this life support system will dissolve. however, the fact that people are able to get themselves into a situation like this is testimony to the supreme power of people to create their own mental reality, one which may have little or nothing to do with any of the original phenomenon they are responding to. why we create the same kind of crap for ourselves over and over again is difficult to unravel, and perhaps not essential... there seems to be a fine line between not avoiding a problem, and actually creating the problem through an inability to let go of it for one reason or another. knowing that you are attached to your habitual mood, is knowledge that can help you, whereas *believing* that this pain is you, or that you must 'want to be in pain' is damaging and a hindrance to elevating your mood and consciousness. these are my thoughts"

From a letter to L:

...and I have three reasons to wake shivering. Today I am trying to put your kind gift of melatonin to use, trying to sleep, but at the same time writing and receiving a spate of e-mails, translating the usual garbage (great to have work to take my mind off my carefully constructed tragedies), finally writing a review of Pod's work and digging little holes of self-analysis and wonderment. A blue fly is buzzing about and many things are in full bloom, from the ancient lilacs to the black tulips. A wasp.

Rereading M's thoughts... I am fairly in agreement, except that there is so much else in romantic love in those rare instances where it functions – the strident, even childish desire becomes a duet, you know.

Yes I adore the blues, do I not. Painfully feeling the two most repeated primal lines of UNDER THE VOLCANO today: the consul's mistranslation, DO YOU LIKE THIS GARDEN? WHY IS IT YOURS? TAKE CARE THAT YOUR CHILDREN DO NOT DESTROY IT! and the terrible mantra: NO SE PUEDE VIVIR SIN AMAR.

I am poised to destroy this garden, why, and drift into places I do not know, and I must like knowing things, things about places, the surge of an almost sickly pride when I can deal with something like my arrival in hell at 4 a.m., shlepping my foreigner's bags through the vicious shadows.

I must like not knowing things.

“That spirit which wears not true love as a garment is better not to have been; its being is nothing but a disgrace. Be drunk in love, for love is all that exists; without the commerce of love there is no admittance to the Beloved. They say, ‘What is love?’ Say, ‘The abandonment of free will.’ He who has not escaped out of free will, no free will has he.” Rumi

It is strange to see H – be seeing H – partly because the earth aspect, her newfound sanity, is from what I resist – the child. I am such a malcontent. I am afraid of her precisely because of that last line of Rumi's – the reality that in my chaos I still... control...

The kid called me daddy yesterday. At first I thought I'd misheard, then again.

Somehow from out those words all of my childhood comes rushing up – even in a simple thing like going out to dinner. (It was until very recently forbidden to take children to restaurants after six, pretty much – like to the movies in the US). My father, what is a father, what is it that makes me hate it is it really fear? Because a part of me does want that, you know. What exactly. Some unattainable ideal, some beauty I can stare at and write and garden, Haus und Grund und Garten rein.

I woke shivering, doubt the cumulo-nimbus floating over the again alive, why was I not alive with you, what is it we suffer from, and wondered can you finger exactly what you would not give, that so distressed me? To be mine, is that it? Possession? What sense does it make?

Because you know I love H differently from anyone – i.e., sexually differently – why? Perhaps it is a similar illness again – what A has been calling her need for *cinematic distance*, it pains her and she needs it.

This is where I am because of the old terror, I saw it in her eyes yesterday, that *she does not love me*, H doesn't. Or she does. And what is it, then, is it that this totality I imagine includes possession? Must?

Again again *quest'ansia di amare* – does that mean that I really cannot love unless it is impossible?

& for her? & when I am with her I love *her* (I'm a good lover in some way, remember, until the sadness smothers me) – she has made so much out of hell, as in can you make this out – that her son (a Scorpio, of course, not quite five) has to go to spend time among how did she say it people who are so afraid of sentiment that they avoid greeting each other on their name's-days...) (which reminded me of your god-forsaken family) ... to hear eternal curses, hatred, and such – watching her with the child is interesting – she lets it do what it wants – to the horror of others – I was watching yesterday and realized how much of what we learn is *transaction* – i.e., do this and you will get this, this is how you learn about consequence, causality – and? Love, *then?* Is the fact that your mother will never abandon you?

Ah, yes, I am in a pickle. When I was little did I tell you this I thought that one got married by entering a huge square where the women walked in one direction, the men in another. I cannot recall who went deosil and who widdershins. I am sorry to discover that these processes are not only not so simple but downright diabolical.

Response from L:

...You disgust me. Please don't write anymore.

+ + +

That it comes flooding back, knowing her, then, before I spent three years as if entombed. I was not drinking then, and after the surge and exaltation – later poisoned with possession, passed through me – I clung desperately to *truth*, as if the articulation of my feelings would save me – from *what?* Perdition?

That love lifts one also from analysis. Analysis is loss.

From the Pod, 97. 17. VII.:

“The Sadhaka... loosens himself from the bonds of family, caste, and society. Finally he becomes a denizen of smasana, cemetery. He is now fully initiated into the secrets of Mahayoga. When he receives the mahapurnadiksabhiseka he carries out his own mortuary rites and is then dead to society. Seated in one spot, he exists in perpetual

samadhi. The Mahasakti, Devi, or Kali has taken possession of his heart, which has become a cemetery in which all passions and inclinations have been burned. He becomes a Paramahamsa, one who is freed from life.”

P.H. Pott
Yoga and Yantra

As I read this passage recently I thought of you, yr dreams of living in a tomb, No LA, and other such drives toward death. I know this stuff is probably old shoe but read it, and think it over a bit. It is relatively clear to me what you are aiming for.

Recall the Rumi:

“That spirit which wears not true love as a garment is better not to have been; its being is nothing but a disgrace. Be drunk in love, for love is all that exists; without the commerce of love there is no admittance to the Beloved. They say, ‘What is love?’ Say, ‘The abandonment of free will.’ He who has not escaped out of free will, no free will has he.”

...

Read this, forget about it. Come back to it. In time it will make sense.

+ + +

I did forget about it, did go back to it, and it does make sense – the quotation from Rumi has become my credo.

No, she said, *no*. Then: I will be waiting for him to call, downstairs, 9 p.m. – her *volatility*, my *fixation*.

Your blue attachment, Gerrit writes.

I did not become *Paramahamsa*, one who is freed from life, was not capable of burning my passions and inclinations. To die that way requires *exaltation* after all, a Night of Fire.

Again Daedalus’ figure of the last unenlightened man, struggling to convert the enlightened multitudes.

The dogmatic Buddhist, O, lying in H’s bed, waking without clarity. I took him to the *Oak Tree* for a Pepsi. Once there was a man who reduced life to this simplicity: *Pepsi-Cola hits the spot, sixteen ounces that’s a lot*. Repeat it endlessly, Renfield. He was ashamed of his lack of clarity.

+ + +

Back *then*, a climacteric. The infinity of things in evidence. I sat on the sill and sang to the moon. Disturbingly indescribable. “Skin by skin I have known you alone.” RK

What do you want from me, she asked, last I saw her, the kiss. My darkness? Light?

Love poetry became comprehensible again.

But that I can lift myself from this. When she wanted to touch me she neither said so nor touched me. Then it was too late. I can’t tell you (that I want to touch you) – it would be a *tale*, a *retelling*, she said.

What becomes central is *commitment*, then? Can ambiguities be central?

The wasp beating against the window again. Why is her beauty not merely aesthetic? What is it that makes a body *belong* – I spoke to her *beast* (what she calls her *cunus*) – *this is yours, this is for you*, meaning my arousal, an exalted arousal, a strange a windblown thing that transmutes me to the marrow, *yours*. “It doesn’t confuse you, my little beast, it doesn’t confuse you?” Her face, her open mouth, my finger snaking inside her, her open eyes, now slate now verdigris, smaragdine, aureate, *vair*.

+ + +

What becomes central is *falsity*, deception. *Decipere* – “to take by causing game to fall.”

Out for *Vechernyy Zvon*, the “Evening Bell,” Bulgarian red. One of the old waterless wooden houses is gone, a heap of rubble. Kaunas Street wide and dusty, the wind brings dust devils. From Ventspils Street one can see the newly restored Lutheran steeple, though there are only thirty Lutherans, some of them Volga Germans, even. Beside it is the dome of the Old Believers’ church, and near that the towers of the Cathedral of Boris and Glyeb, painted in purples and blues that are by turns fantastic and gaudy. Beyond that, the tall white towers of the Catholics. The buildings behind the *gastronomiya* will never be finished, they have put bars in the windowless holes now. The brick wall still says SEKTOR GAZA in Cyrillic, whether an adolescent musical preference or obscure political comment I cannot tell. Through all of this – the dust turns to mud in rain – carless people trudge with big bags of potatoes, headscarves, blue buckets to fill with mushrooms or to take the garbage to the *Orange Dream*, the garbage truck, orange, that is called a dream because it rarely arrives on time. The truck is also sometimes called a *Norba Alfredovna*, *Norba* the make of the vehicle, *Alfredovna* Alfred’s daughter, Alfred, who grew up down this very street before he rose to power and supported the coup against Gorbachev and sat in jail while Red scum brought him dirt from Dvinsk, who effected this system, this ritual, of having to go out to meet the garbage truck, with the blue pail, in pajamas, *dobra utra*, what did you do last night in a country where everything is the same, *ciao*, the system against the attraction of rats.

“...the king found his rarest emerald, the Stone of Doubt, for whose sake death sent its children into the world. Why emerald? Because in the enigmatic glance of Venus as she

is fucking, all loss and all undoing can be read. As well as all love and prospering. Ambiguous. The star chart goes up in flames.” – RK

Last night, the evening star. She was brighter than I had ever seen her, dangerous, hard. When O told me that H had called, in “heavy hysteria,” it *clarified* what I felt – reading, weeping. I only weep at poetry when in love, yes. What I could not place yesterday – a nameless terror – becomes her child’s fever, passed in a kiss.

What we *see*. Blake’s Doors of Perception – cleansed. And the *stuff*, then, the dross, the *caput mortuum*, goes away, the war is far. The drekh. The residue – the transactions (“tis not a game that plays at mates and mating, Provence knew...”), the sump of cogitation, the garbage sweeping in with the newspapers, the secret government. There is a government yet more secret. Some terrible brotherhood.

The war spreads to Montenegro, the Russian Duma passes a law banning all trade with Latvia (because we are “russophobes”), Yeltsin will veto it. Again and again people lecture me on how they are incomprehensible. *We*. “We Latvians.” “We Russians believe...” Was it Pushkin who wrote that *Russia is a country not to be understood with the mind*. “We are different.” “You have no culture in America.” The burden of soul, an indescribable thing, unclear as love.

A saw love everywhere here, under impossible conditions, families forced to live in tiny rooms, forced to love one another through alcoholism and various personal hells while birch trees grew from the roofs, forced to marry and divorce and give birth in various Byzantine combinations in order to get an extra few square meters of space, which quickly filled with those rare children above the horizon of a declining birth rate. I saw the sickness here as *spiritual*, and yet there *is* spirit everywhere, and an astonishing capacity for forgiveness – I have met many who passed part of their lives in some concentration camp, yet bear no hate. A personal forgiveness also – a man who sees *white mice* (the classic delirium tremens here, white mice, recently the *mafija* has become a more popular sight...) can return, there is no onus of shame, we fail, we betray our lovers, he has a *bad character*, and yet *davai*, we stare beyond his character at whatever beauty this man has, abhor his *sins*, yet... love...

I told H things – should I have held my tongue? – that I used to go, at dawn, and stand under her window in the Coopers’ Street, in the Old City. That during our... flight... I would be walking in the boulevards and slowly, suddenly, would be inside her, *physically*, my *phallos* buried in her *kteis*, alive.

In doubt, the sorriest realization would be that she indeed does not love me, does not love even where *I allow her to take herself*, that I am not even sure I do, take her, transport her...

To take by causing game to fall. My own hardness with myself – is it really only a lack of faith, a yearning for () –

...and as I write this I am *letting go*. Is it that I write this? “We are different,” irreducible, unknown, spectral quantities. Is that not what every adolescent lover needs? “We shall slit our wrists with X-Acto knives.” I am letting go –

“He also thought of me as a goddess, as a creature of rare purity, and became obsessed with the idea that the child wasn’t his, and refused to have its paternity tested, even though he could not know by its pigmentation, you both having red hair...”

And the bruise on her arm gives the lie to her chastity, which I am not interested in *at all*, as if *that* is what I want of her, property, chattel.

It believed it could free itself through language because it did not try. Did not *want* to, preferred not to, having as much of an allergy to whatever would come if it its motherfather backwards as if as it had an allergy against its own immune system. Love, and waste. Carrots with cardamom seeds and piquancy, the ubiquitous red beet, a slab of calf or pig, grilled and given, child. Will you be good? The leftovers lie on the table.

Can't this be a truth, if half of it is, she wrote.

That there was something between us, *between us*. Everything became possible, in a way that struck terror into whatever is left of my heart, *that* one, not the ordinary heart. Already in the past tense.

I used to know of her approach because the dogs would howl, I could hear her coming nearer, the poor animals frightened by this unnatural woman, the sway of her pale hips, her height, her eyes if she ever used them could disembowel a poor poet, did. And *seize* her, make me a strong see-thing, a sea thing. In her presence, I can touch what I have dimly intuited et cetera. And I will repeat this until there is nothing left of it?

I don't want to possess you, I said. You *cannot*, she answered.

So it is a trick of time. The priests had very low voices and saffron robes, they taught their subjects with strangely shaped little mirrors. I came back, and she refused to look into my eyes, more in love with her misery than anything, perhaps.

I also told her that she taught me the *moment*, momentous as it is. *Truly come in the nick of time*, Gerrit. Clutching the star map. I would have been better *off*, *away*. Looking in on her, the single mother, student, those things we supposedly are... The world an impertinent blue, the spiritual color, Mary Mary quite contrary.

She is walking on her own skin.

Marik, eating oysters, said that we understood one another because we could cast off our identities, were not attached to any version of ourselves.

Deep question, your dark or your light. By some analysis I am here in hell only because I want to be, hope that you appear on the garden path. Yet if you did, you would look at Venus, there, not into my eyes. That this is myself, *after all*. As the Pod receives his essence, under his annoying private life, after. *It doesn't confuse you, my little beast?* No, no, it does not, I have wanted such a beast, wanted someone whose dreams had such potency, but also to be wanted, to wake with your form before my eyes – whence the *despair*? An array of things (will you be good?) (as the five senses are, in Latvian,

“the five minds,”) – there is an other place, a place made of refusal, “lips that would kiss form prayers to broken stone...” I am perhaps *old* at last, also, the love you offer I look at quizzically, (the pronouns shift)... that the person who most lied to me is she who draws the truth from me, that is hell.

Once, in this despair, I took the train to Riga (“take the plague and go to Riga”) and – a child beat my shadow and – I stepped from the train and saw a lost one, a woman so gone from herself – self – cursing, falling, trying to walk, *those eyes*, those eyes here, as if the clouds had infected them – and I got a hard-on – that there is something in me that *responds* (“responsibility... is to keep the ability to respond” RD) to what is about to *vanish* (“if you love them that dissolve...” – wrote Gerrit, long ago) – is it, is it what I love? I have a fine mind, even after, and yet – my soul –

That I need to make sense of things. A’s puke, even. Everything a manifestation of the discourse between Augoeides and I, yes, eye? *I have taught myself to cease to feel*, down there. (Does it confuse you, my little beast?) *Vampirical*.

If you look inside sometime, when you know yourself. This is how you get there. To touch you makes me clear, a sick clarity.

“And when you listen hearing, and when you listen touch.” (Michael Palmer)

The Histories

the retrieval of love / your hide

After love, madness. I had not slept for a week, and returning (from the *moon* – even O saw that I had been *somewhere else*) to this city thronged with jackdaws, tiny white flowers had spread beneath the writing-window like a spray of semen. There were moments when I could feel her, as if she *gripped* me, as if her long, slender fingers clutched the back of my head. There were other tones in my voice, sonorous, strange melodies, and my touch, too, had changed, become acutely sensitive. Even the growth of my nails was different from that moment, from coitus with her.

Mirklis, the Latvian word for moment, derives from *blinking*, but relates to the word *morning*. “In a flash.” I felt that I had wandered into a particular place in time, one half beyond it, and strove desperately not to fall from it, be driven from it – I became a bundle of nerves, obsessed with number and the *meaning* of everything, writing insane letters to my friends and former lovers, counting the cherries I (thought of as *my wife*) brought to me – the impression was strong enough to *infect* – I became my assistant, even, as I devised strange rites, lighting and extinguishing fires on different sides of the house, asking I to draw maps of the objects haphazardly scattered through the room, noting the time, drawing lines on the walls where the shadows of leaves fell at a particular hour. *Twelve cherries... I ate three... that leaves – nine cherries!* I had a vivid hallucination of Baphomet living in the chimney, and lay on my back trying to hold the bricks together, convinced that if I relaxed my attention the chimney would fly

apart. The Belarussian crone (*staraya vedzma*, the old witch) had hung herbs to dry in the attic; I knelt between them at the southern window at noon, counting white beans that had spilled onto the dirt floor there, writing in spirals, writing backwards, insane. Sleeping beside I, I dreamt that she was a sea serpent and woke with my hands around her throat, trying to strangle her. O took me to some Buddhist friends of his, whose big Irish setter whimpered and whined, staring at me. There, I finally collapsed, my glasses bent *outward* and twisted, as if something had passed from me, and the moment ended.

Gerrit wrote back: “leave meanings behind or rather the insatiable [hydroptic?] craving for monomyth... error is not the stake here, whether the [schrelos?] are mired or not”

It ended, and I was left with the ash. What had been *wetness* was now a heap of shriveled words and broken impressions. *Tantric fiasco*, the Pod called it. I fell ill. Blood would sometimes drip from my ears as I stooped to the dreary task of cobbling my mind back together. What Gerrit wrote of Nerval: “He did not give himself to live in curious and divided worlds.” I *had*. I thought of RK’s line: *Love found a soft long thigh and followed it home*. I had not only broken the vow I had made (on the moon, on the sill of Room 42 in the *Little Sun*, her white body in the bed, holding a knife to my breast swearing never to forget that *this is love*), I had destroyed my own *philosophy*, which was to *follow Love* no matter where. I did not follow it home.

And her curse: *you will go back inside yourself now*. She looked at my writings, the tiny soft pencil *écriture des mouches*: “What if I tell you that your book is chaos?”

She wandered around the city, and things broke everywhere she went, water gushed from the toilets, people fell ill. When she neared this house, dogs howled. I made little crosses out of the twigs of mountain ash and copper wire and placed them in the windows to protect our dwelling. *Dwelling*. She returned to Riga (“take the plague and go to Riga”). I felt her leave, that night, my chest filled with chalybs, the air in the empty room livid, her astral fingers releasing me.

The Moon. I had met her long before, briefly, when she was only eighteen, consort to a young, alcoholic poet. I was walking with the poets B and R down Freedom Boulevard (what has been Alexanderstrasse, Hitlerstrasse, uliitse Lenina) in Riga. She stood at a distance, smoking her cheap, foul *Primas* (she has trouble getting them now) in a long holder made of lilac wood and said, “what a lovely ruddy beard you have.” We went to the old *Caucasus* and drank champagne, the five of us, her staring at me and writing in a little notebook, refusing to show me what she wrote, and then to the entrance of the Dom’s crypt. B was in one of his laments, the uselessness of his work, etc., when H suddenly burst into a recital of B’s translations of Pessoa, from memory, the timbre of her voice angelic, otherworldly. A couple of militiamen headed towards us from across the square, and H warded off what could have been serious trouble by calling out to them, “boys!” They told us that we should read the Bible and drink less wine while B kept repeating who he was, the great B, leading intellectual. We piled into a taxi and headed for where I was living, drank and grilled sausage, H inventing rhymes about each of us, folk songs, impromptu ditties, infuriating R with – her sexual perception? We kissed, Bohemians, and I fingered the top of her silk stocking, her soft long thigh,

and heard her moan. We all slept on the floor, and in the morning I accompanied her to the tram stop – she was still in high school. I kissed her forehead.

The Moon. Time passed. I dreamt of her, and thought it odd, since I had not *seen her*. I imagined her as *cold* somehow, distant and superficial as a lover. I did not need a lover. This was a time of prosperity and wandering, Hiiumaa, Paernu, Liepaaja, the flourishing of my love with I, the origins of this household. How did it sour? Drunken nights, Greeks from Odessa lying in the bathtub singing, mornings pursuing *what* in my notebooks (“& what if I tell you your book is chaos”), friends, garden. I taught, fervently, meeting a few of my students after classes to continue the lectures, befriending a few. I began to get letters from America telling of David Rattray’s illness, did I know him? Barely – we had lunch once, in the Oyster Bar under Grand Central Station. One night, during a huge party, the house illuminated by a hundred candles, Mozart blaring from the *radiotehnika*, champagne flowing, I received a copy of Rattray’s “Mr. Peacock,” and simultaneously a letter informing me that Rattray had died. I declared an *evacuation* – ordered everyone from the house, gave I some water (she was puking), and stayed up all night translating the poem.

In the morning I read it to my class, my friend the philosophy teacher, X, accompanying me with his guitar. The poem moved me as I had not been moved for a very long time. I quit drinking and felt a *spirit* nigh.

I and I rode our bicycles deep into Lettigallia for solstice. It is a night when the gates between the worlds fly open and souls pass between them. There was a hideous, alien violence between us.

From my notebook: *The Day of Grasses – riding our bikes home through the freezing fog – everywhere the Liguos fires smoldering, dawn – it was beautiful – it was Hell – goats led through the night, boats tied to trees – A plot of rye – cornflowers there – a dray horse – a pair of hives – an old barn built of logs – a stork’s nest – a potato field – an ancient well – an aging house –an austerity, & their daughters wayward rarely*

The city on returning – even here the smoldering fires, the windows of the drowsy houses were eyes – the dirt yards – the windows were the eyes not looked at, out, out at – Not looked into – but the fertile dirt between us – in affliction – what we share is nothing –

*I mean it is dark in the shew-stone, or the lump of blue glass we found on the road’s shoulder in the sun –
So this is what the other side is like – o it felt so, & no poem for it – your hurt and my darkest self –
You were asking the woman who had made the beer (Rauchbier, smoky) there what her parents taught her – “What parents, I live here, no parents, come stay with me” –*

“Thus, for those about to die, the North Wind ‘breathes upon them and then revives them, though at the point of death’ while the South Wind destroys them. The one is colder and tends to freeze them and hold them in the rigid grip of generis while the other is

warmer and so melts them and sends them back up to the warmth of the divine.”
(Porphyry)

*Boreas, the erotic wind, rapes “shaking the solid doorflaps” Milk to draw them
in from dreams / opaque’d muladhara*

and – there, away there, far away – sweet seed
*Fog iced to trees like milk, demons we were the mouths of, for, or licked, licking – is Day
Eos, is*

*What the Ximiya looked like as we rode through that district at dawn, the rot burn
crematorium stench – goats tied to trees, boats – swamp water reflecting the tall
smokestack belching fire – in the dirt yards –*

“& men began to light fires upon the earth”

+ + +

The lump of blue glass is on the windowsill, as it happens, with some other little objects I & I collected, a dark blue bottle from an ancient pharmacy holds a dried rose, a grotesque chunk of molten green glass, a trilobite, a conch. The house has such objects scattered throughout – sacred vessels from Old Believers’ churches, lanterns found in the basements of houses being torn down, boxes of amber, weird rocks, skeletons, skulls, coins found while planting trees. Our house. Home. *What do you remember?* Pain.

I cried on the very night I returned, Walpurgisnacht, as it happens. *I have not cried for years, not since you were last here.*

That year, “my most immemorial year,” we spent Walpurgisnacht on Blue Hill in Livonia, site of the witches’ sabbaths of old.

I dreamt Archimboldo’s Emperor Rudolph, a face formed of fruit.

+ + +

The Moon. Not long after crossing into the other world on the Day of Grasses – I fell from her bicycle, the temperature plunging, frost – seeing a porcupine in the forest – not long after, I went to Riga and read that translation of “Mr. Peacock” at a gathering of Latvian writers from all over the world, before television cameras. It was the most intense reading I have ever given.

Suddenly I had emerged from a sort of internal exile – Daugavpils is a city people avoid, and while living here I had almost no contact with anyone other than the local underground. In Riga, the salient beings of my life had gathered, an accident – S, whose love when it happened had also transformed me, was there – we spoke for the first time since I had left her – my mother, whom I was able to *forgive*, though she would call me at the hotel *The Little Sun*, unable to sleep, seeing the length of my hair and beard (“my son, *insane!*”) – the writer U, my mentor briefly, the only Latvian in the West with similar interests, his library what mine would be were I not an indigent wanderer...

The writer U was incensed that I was not drinking, kept trying to slip vodka into my orange juice. I allowed myself small quantities of red wine on occasion. One night, my old lover S, U and I went to visit the poet R, who lived near the Central Station, in the shabby street across from my hotel, *The Little Sun*.

U has some deep-seated pain – some have even suspected that he “did things” in the war. When he is here, he drinks, to the point that he has collapsed in the airport before returning. He brought Buddhism to this country, and his philosophical interests – Corbin, Heidegger, Jung, Swedenborg – combined with his – poetic desires? – have drawn me toward him... he is married to the Venus of Willendorf, a woman of peasant extraction who keeps him in line – keeps him alive, takes him away, confiscates the bottle. Once, he had me go to her on my knees, begging forgiveness for getting him drunk. Since she only allowed this when he had visitors, he would for a while call me whenever he needed to get smashed.

At R's, I sipped some Georgian wine and watched the poet P begin to get cross-eyed, while S and U and everyone drank in the kind of Bohemian conviviality that still exists here.

And then H appeared. I had not seen her since that first meeting, the crypt, B, touching her. She showed up in a dress that left her half-naked – it was one of those warm nights that are so rare here.

U introduced me to some prominent literati: “Do you know what he has in his head? Chaos. And chaos is *fecund*.”

The poet P is a very charming man who becomes violent when drunk. His eyes cross and he beats up men to take their women. He has been thrown off trains for this. In addition to writing fine poetry and producing sublime translations from Turkish, P edits the local variation on *Soldier of Fortune*.

I touched H's foot. What have you been doing with yourself? *Drinking. A bottle of vodka a day*. And suddenly she was in my arms, moaning, her hips moving as though she was being entered.

Without warning, the assembled company darkened into violent hatred, a knife was pulled, P went after S, the poet K pointed at H and stuck his finger into his mouth, as if inducing vomiting. K's wife, J, with whom I had early on had a brief, abortive affair, leapt into my lap. *For God's sake*, she said, *don't get involved with that woman*.

S said that she wanted to *kill her, why doesn't someone just kill her*. It came out of *nowhere*, some realm H moves in, the darkness of her sensuality, its lovelessness, what?

H withdrew into herself after J occupied my lap (J later said that she did so only to *keep her away from me*). H made an unclear offer – to go off with me – while I had already promised that U and S could stay in my hotel. For once, I kept a promise, or was it *fear* – that *loyalty* I felt to I, to *us*, to what we had made.

And *here* was the ambiguity of loyalty. Even as the darkness spread, as S rose and lectured everyone (“think of your mothers, of Latvia, how can you behave like this!”), I was *elsewhere*, in the moans of H, in the congealed feelings of these people I felt *close* to, in the solstitial opening...

We departed, U and S and I, P making vague threats about S leaving with me, U barely able to walk. *The Little Sun* admitted us because they recognized him – he is famous. “Where are we,” he groaned. “Is this Latvia?”

And so it came to pass that S and I were again in bed together after years of resentment. In the middle of the night, she departed.

+ + +

The old man is still alive. It takes him half a day to round the corner. If you greet him, he turns, and is still turning when you return from the store. It pleases him, a greeting, and he turns. Later, he turns back and continues to round the corner. He does not know what country he is living in. He blabbers of the birds he kept as a child. Once he has rounded the corner, he turns back, and slowly, slowly returns to the mean hovel whence he came.

+ + +

The next day I spent in the palace that was then the Writers’ Union. I most remember my conversation with D, who has since died of cancer. I asked her why she did not come to this country to live, and she burst into tears. *I could not take the psychological climate*, she said. *The venom, the back-stabbing.*

It was almost as an afterthought that I called H. *An afterthought.* I assumed that whatever we had felt for one another was purely the product of the drunken atmosphere. We agreed to meet at six at what is known as *the little clock*, hard by the Freedom Monument, the chocolate factory’s clock which has been a favoured meeting-place since the twenties.

At six I stood and waited, but H did not appear. I wrestled with whether to call her or not – as if I still had a chance to return, to regain this house... I... was... in a strange state of *exaltation*. And I could *feel* her, sleeping, not far away.

Someone took a piece of chalk and wrote *PETERIS YOU ARE PETERIS* on the sidewalk next to the clock. I remember realising that this was a message to some other Pēteris, someone who hadn’t shown at the same appointed time, and simultaneously taking it as a message to me, that I was, for once, myself, that I was *on horseback, in the saddle*, present. I called H and she hurried over.

I had told her that I would look at her poems. *Is that really what you want?* No. I want you because you are beautiful.

We drank champagne – I had a little – at a sidewalk café, and ended up in my room at *The Little Sun*.

I still resisted making love to her. She said, we are adults, we have lovely bodies, we will sleep beside one another.

The rest is a blur. I took few notes. What was there to take notes of? We slept, as friends, naked.

I entered her at dawn. (Beauty will be convulsive or will not be.) Her lashes grew at orgasm, her mouth open, her hands drawing me inside her, it was *metaphysical*, it was like entering a dream. Like, like, like. I paused when she came, my whole being rushing into her, *ending my life*.

Reified dream. I *quaked*. I could feel the *history of my body*, its distortions wrought by false desire, as if before *this* I had not known purity of touch, as if my body was something subject to *this*, as if *this* was what I had always sought –

“So she answered him, bending down, a lambent flame of blue, all-touching all penetrant, her lovely hands upon the black earth & her lithe body arched for love and her soft feet not hurting the little flowers. Thou knowest! And the sign shall be my ecstasy, the consciousness of the continuity of existence, the omnipresence of my body.” (Liber AL)

+ + +

Cold rain all night, yet even ill I have acclimatized myself, to the cool, already seemingly fleeting period of great light, *pavasaris*, spring, *vasara*, from **ues*, to shine. In less than a month the northern darkness will begin its return, but this brief period is bathing in a dream. The smell of the lilacs released by rain, so strong that I can smell it even sick, when yesterday’s Sunday dinner left me insensate, cottage cheese in cream with dill, boiled potatoes, cucumbers – I did not even notice the black pepper. We dine together on Sundays, I, I’s mother, myself.

E-mail from RK, responding to my usual desperation of communication, that he will be reading these pages tomorrow. I then read them, going back to the beginning of this endeavor for the first time in almost a year.

From S: I couldn’t trace what struck me within the work to specific fragments.....it is, more so than in the works of other authors, the shape, the movement, that evokes.....I don’t know what it evokes, something mental that is palpable, emotionally neutral, and every word I give it disgusts me.) But I do want to give some reaction to your writing, and everything I articulate seems unrelated to what I’m trying to express. Returning your lines gives me something to say. I avoided your last question “what should be done with it?” intentionally. Your second question “How does the personal strike you?”....The personalness doesn’t come off as indulgence, I think, because it’s wide open, because it’s part of the difficulty in distinguishing one thing from another (i.e. inside/outside). And I think it’s necessary, for that reason. Every so often, when you’re talking about another person, a relationship, I feel shut out, like I’m overhearing a conversation. Is this desirable?.....the rest of the time, I seem, as I said, absorbed in something, part of the bloodstream. The first question: “What should be

done with it?” is harder for me to answer, since I know nothing about publishing. It’s worth publishing, of course - at least from my perspective. And I don’t think the personalness will be much of a barrier....but I wonder if the lack of closure that you talked about, will (I am NOT suggesting that you give it closure...that would be terrible, probably hilarious)...I’m sure you’ve considered all this. I think most people expect poets to tidy the world, to create (or uncover, if you’d rather) connections that give them a sense of order. But if you can publish it, publish it. There are, I assume, still readers who want to expend an effort, and who will find this work familiar.

+ + +

An earlier note from S: That sense of space (almost like the words are incidental, sporadic condensations of sound inside textured air - emptiness/not exactly empty - only sporadic isn’t quite the word), of unraveling, is something I really admire, and want in my own poetry...room for what it is impossible to say (what I am struggling to say and is indifferent to being said). At times it is impossible to distinguish what you have written from my own dreams. Your talking about the Doppelgänger...my ‘multiplications’ is something that obsesses me as well (the sense that I am reincarnated in every person I see, or that I have divided to create them?)....my skin dissolves like an egg sac and hundreds of bodies spill out.

+ + +

In that time, crouched in the attic above with the spilled white beans, my handwriting spinning in loops, words going backwards, *gematria* (and *she* was doing this also – when I saw her again, much later, after the period of light, in the bleak November – *schwarze Novemberzerstörung* – she asked me, *are you trying to write everything? That is what I am doing*. The moon it has no air. She would squat in her room in the cooper’s street, her drunken landlady harassing her as *whore*, scrawling everything that passed through her head into a spiral notebook, scribbled drawings of *space* in blue ball-point. *Hysteria*.

+ + +

From the day I entered her, my diary entries are no longer dated. The moon was full in Capricorn. I went out to look for U – H and I had decided to interview him – and found myself watching the procession of the great Song Festival, hundreds of thousands of people pouring down Freedom Boulevard, the choirs in folk costume, the men’s heads decorated with oak leaves, the maidens’ with flowers, singing solstice songs, *liguo, liguo* (the etymology is *lingam*), and stood at the Hotel de Rome where a group of very short Africans in gray business suits, with amber eyes, stood on granite pedestals watching the festivities, gravely. It felt like something from a boy’s book about Priapus.

We found U. He asked me whether I was in love with her. The chant of Mandharava burst from my throat. He smiled.

As it turned out, U's wife, the Venus of Willendorf, came from the *seta* down the road from H's, and recognized in her the family's appearance. U's wife also told me that they meant for me to inherit U's library.

H kept asking him about the *ewig-Weibliche*. "Sieviete ir dieviete," he said, woman is goddess.

She drank, constantly.

Back in *The Little Sun*, she drew from me my history, or parts of it, parts that suddenly flowed together in a vivid narrative. We squatted on the floor, and her eyes *enveloped* me, the color of the Universe in Lady Frieda Harris' tarot, and I could feel the snow blowing through my tale, what I said was *palpable* – I could *see* my story, and *see* that she *saw* it. It was so uncanny that I grew afraid.

I proposed to her. She had a vision of a pair of twins, ours, and we drank wine with the hotel's staff (I allowed myself a sip only, going downstairs to buy her vodka. *I will go insane*, she said when I asked for her hand. I sat surrounded by her eyes and suddenly felt myself transmuted into a long black oblong, then rectangle, without depth. It was not *nothing*, it was something worse than nothing.

When I came to, she was crouched in the window, saying the Lord's Prayer in Lettigallian.

Another time (within that time), I felt a worm come out of the sky and enter my hand. When I recovered from the vision, there was blood on my hand.

She had a strange silver ring inscribed with a C and a Greek *theta*. I still remember the taste of it. She spoke of her grandmother, but would tell nothing that she had learned from her, the witchcraft.

She referred to her cunnus as *the black moon*.

I sent I a telegram: *the snake's tail is in its mouth*.

And then *above this, outside this, the shell of this?* She said she prostituted herself. She asked for money, and I refused to give it to her. *Hysteria*. Her arms were severely bruised, by one of the poets at the party, after I had left – or so she said, I quickly lost trust in her as the lies she told multiplied. It was the last scene from *The Lady from Shanghai*, the House of Mirrors.

Once, she went to sleep with someone. I stayed in the room, writing in my notebook ("*the sense in which it is not possible for any of us to part*"), and at the moment whoever he was entered her – *I knew this* – I was thrown about the room, my head banging against the wall. When she returned, she asked me if I had survived the experience. "I do love you a little," she said, leaping into my lap, "I really do."

Did she? She half-accepted my proposal. (It makes me think of the confusion surrounding Mina in *Dracula*, somehow – invisible suitors, even. *Highborn kinsmen*.)

She asked me to go to the Writers' Union and arrange a loan for her. I went and spoke with V, there. He sneered at me, as if he knew I had been bewitched. He called her behaviour *disgusting*.

She told me that she had cancer, that she would die. I told V that I did not want to see what happened to Z happen to her – Z was a suicide, a young poet whose cries for help everyone had ignored.

Can't it be true, if half of it is? She half-accepted my proposal. As I was leaving the building with the poet R, she appeared and said to him: *Now I will be a tied-up mare, venom dripping from her lips.*

One night she returned late to *The Little Sun* and lay in bed, *I am waiting for you*, stroking her opening. I climbed into bed – she reeked of vodka. I told her that I wanted her sober. “That’s it! That’s it! Tomorrow I will wake as an *ordinary woman*! You’ve killed me...”

She wanted to go to Burtnieku Lake, where I even now have not yet been, where my ancestral home is (though replaced by the cafeteria of the kolkhoz *Friendship*). It is reputed to be a magical lake with a sunken castle that can sometimes be glimpsed. (*Burtnieks* is a sorcerer, bee-keeper – a maker of marks in trees.) “I want to show you one more thing,” she said. “One more little thing.”

I would not ejaculate inside her. Later I saw this as my instinct for self-preservation; that, had I come in her, I would be lost. Wandering the narrow streets of the old city, I discovered a strange building in the Blacksmiths' Street – at Number 49 – with little devils carved above the windows, triangles in circles, grapes, grape leaves, Bacchus. One stone face became my friend – a man restraining his seed, just above the Number “49.”

She later claimed that I *had* seeded her in that first, ecstatic coupling. She was mistaken.

+ + +

Writing this, remembering that narrative told on the floor of the seedy hotel room, the *sense* it suddenly made of my life (“insatiable hydroptic longing for monomyth”) – writing this, the sun veiled in thin clouds, waiting for O to arrive, waiting for noon to come, when she will be waiting for me to call in the dim lobby of the dormitory, writing this in *senselessness*, surrounded not by dewy eyes but dumb analyses.

“I wanted to touch you, but to tell you that now would be a tale, a retelling.”

I called her at noon

I called her at noon. The *dezhurante* answered the telephone, “yes, Sir, speak.” I asked to speak with H, giving her full name, which she once despised but is now neutral towards, using that or her *nom de plume*. “The Lady in question excused herself and

requested that you appear in half an hour.” I said that I would call in half an hour. O and I were in what used to be the the meat processing building, now a labyrinthine market. The carp swam in the filthy tubs. O was excited by the place – a true labyrinth, you can come here easily in your dreams. “No, Sir, I understood that you were to arrive here in person, not call.” “Yes, Ma’am.”

O and I went to *The Oak Tree*. I was still feverish. Along the way I listened to him tell stories, rumors of her lovers since I left. “The one, __, he is a very strong man, and has seen everything – when I asked him what it was like, to know her, he answered ‘don’t go there’... That is her *nature*.”

O understands – he helped me through the desperate years after her departure. *Everything has a price*, he said today, you want tantra, you pay. Perhaps what I find in her – lose in her – is part and parcel with what he calls *hysteria*.

O accompanied me to the dormitory. I for some reason ended up telling him about Merry’s bullfight in Dogtown... (FIRST FALL, SECOND FALL...) – he waited downstairs.

I mounted the stairs to 401 and knocked. She was asleep. She tried to rouse herself, and I thought, need you? Stay in twilight, love.

I had expected a continuation of the *no* she had forwarded. There was none, there was no *no*, no *yes* either. “A moment of panic with my son, wishing you were here, I dreamt you, touching me, saying *everything will be fine, fine*.”

And the transactions? (*Tis not a game that plays at mates and mating, Provence knew...*) Is that what it is, in retrospect? My offer stood – I can *chance* her, I have come to love even the tangled webs, but I shan’t be there for her until she is *present*.

A kiss. (She used my surname, in the vocatove, as she often does: *O Cedrins*, you should have begun with a kiss, dispelled my doubts.) That I do not want it to begin again, the hysteria, *find me in you...* I askt, and no answer.

“What do you want?” “You.”

I told her that from what she had said, things that were already in my mind but indistinct had come clear, that I could see what she was, but that she was also *another* to me, mine – (*You’re the psychologist, you know what projection is.*)

What do I want? Make a space for us, a holy place, and do what you wish with what flies in your head, but leave that place untouched. No answer.

We spoke for over an hour into a calm, bringing things up from *it is very nearly six years ago now*, everything breaking into now/then, light/dark, promise and disappearance... and yet – enough from her to know that she *would* open to me, were there no permanence involved (permanence/impermanence)... I tried to tell her that we could be what she *chose*, but under all her protestations (“I can ask nothing of you” “you can ask, but ask it deeply”) there is her usual arachnid effort to *draw me in*, not into herself but into something spun of her – and I will go? When I well know that I

love her, in a way that my conscious caution will not be available to me? After she has extracted promises, she flees: *I don't know, I can leave at anytime, I... I tell you I can leave at anytime and yet I don't want that to be a stone for you, don't let that become a stone.*

Your tenderness binds me, she said, *what do you think, will you always be so tender?* Far more tender. Far, far more tender. I reminded her of the episode where I did not want to fuck her when she was drunk, laughter, *far more tender*. The dualities – she keeps repeating how she had to forget the past to become a mother, how she finds in her child *the perfect mirror*, how she does not want me to show her *herself*.

From *that time*, one of the few things I could not remember was her parentage – I brought this up when she said that she did not like it for her little son to spend time there, at the family *seta*. Her father was put in a psychiatric institution for professing *Eastern Religion*. “Not like O, at that time,” she said, “at that time it was a serious thing.”

Don't let that become a stone. Help me dissolve my doubts. That I would leap, of old, that one leaps differently when close (“sleeping far away from one I love is not alone the way alone is” RK) –

That *this* is as far as *that*. Now/then, light/dark, spilt and conserved. *That I wanted you to be here and put your hand on my son's forehead.* A perfect little reflection. “The level of being attracts the life,” George quoted Gurdjieff.

This is as far as that – I could retell every detail of what we said, where my hands were, what showed or ran under what we spoke before it reached our ears, the promise of her eyes, of skin, of what it is to sit here committing it to disk, a narrative. Rereading the last section, I felt more than anything my *own... posture*.

I told her: *you taught me* how one lets doubt in *oneself*, that if you truly *will* something, you find it, do not sully it, allow it to *be*, no matter how it flowers in illusion... do the same for me, I askt her. If you do not want me, find a way for us to be. If you want me, *leave it alone*.

There is a way, GQ said, to be on all of these levels simultaneously. This was when GQ taught me that to find a being one took that being to be on the level one wanted to see them, did not incessantly drag them *down*. I have known a few people who did this, who *flourished* in this way. *I flourished* after learning that process, and yet return to the inner sanctum, to *this* level? Seed me, seed me, said the mud.

What strikes me in the *histories* is that I *saw* everything differently, tongued and sucked into those places that *leave this place* (is that what I am? [“viz., alcohol does rot the honesties”] ...someone utterly incapable of being *here?* Where is here?) / those places – (are they places?) that are not obscured by *this* kind of thought, stick figures for the fire – and yet, and yet.

What do you want? Someone to whom I can tell everything. (Go find yourself a notebook.) Someone to whom I can tell everything that also *perceives*. Transmutes. *Is the perceiv'd* .

“What if I tell you your book is chaos?” *It is all an asthma*, she also said.

And were she to speak only to herself? Perhaps that is the nature of a god. The rest of us *overhear*.

To find her human, after all these years, afraid of the divine, afraid even of the memory of the *sin* that made her so? And yet she has only put it by, can't she see that, put it away, to one side, sealed it over. Again and again she said she needed to cease looking at the past to transform herself into a mother.

+ + +

Pansies, white tulips, lilac, white lilac, Persian lilac, thousands of dandelions in bloom or gone to seed, the first irises. Feeding the furnace birch. Hard to get pure birch these days, they mix it with aspen. Birch burns hot, lit with first drafts. Drizzle, wet lilac, grass, crabgrass already tall, tiger lilies already reaching to the knees. And then the nameless flowers – *ragana* (the witch), is blue, the spiritual colour. *Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow*. The rain in the brain falls gently on the pain.

Birch burns hottest, milk spoils more quickly in this weather. Salt, placed between the windows, keeps the glass dry. A piece of silver dropped into a jar of water keeps it from going bad. A spoonful of sugar, poured into a litre of heated milk, keeps it fresh for a night and a day. *Wilderness is not what is cherished here*. Nature at the hand of man – *garden* – a sure hand, one the ax fits, *he has golden hands*. Under the Soviets, the alder, a nasty wood, grew over what had been beloved landscapes. Now the alder groves are thinned, the streams freed, vistas renewed. Apple blossoms, rain. Hyacinth.

Let this not become a stone to you. That I can go away at any moment. We can always go away, can't we? Her nature.

“The king found his rarest emerald, the Stone of Doubt, for whose sake Death sent its children into the world...” To wake like that, tentacles wrapped around three bodies and the stone glinting through the flesh, a glass of *Monasterskaya izba* undrunk on the oaken table, golden sweet-smelling wine, the kettle whistling, rain, lilac, sorrow. Not fear so much anymore. Transparency. Release.

A letter from A: *H. . .she sounds both wonderful and also intolerable. this may not be right. this is what i remember thinking that first night we met, too. but you will remember better than i - i told you that about someone - was it H? you seem to have said that the contrast is appealing somehow. or compelling. is she the one that said “maybe”? or something else 1/2 way to your proposal. if yes, and she is keeping that up, forget her. oh, god, i'll have to start drinking wine soon, i guess.*

We can always go away, can't we? *Forget her*. Of her own lover, A writes: *what i do know is that he, um, i mean, i am not the object of his sexual desires* – and yet, responding to

my “that marriage would have to be *everything*, the solitude and introspection and mad lust and repose and friendship – and it isn’t, and it hurts to see it so far away, or is it that the impossible is its nature,” A writes: *i read it over and over again and each time with a different configuration of people and it doesn’t really matter who you meant exactly, because, you are, in your wisdom, which is extensive, absolutely right. right about what marriage must be, but not that the impossible is its nature. and so i’ll hope (folly again) that that is eventually something we both are engaged in, whatever the configuration.*

But we do not *know*. We have not *seen*. Few books upset me more than a biography that attempts to show the interior of a relationship, especially the interior of a marriage. There is the *lust* (simple!?), the contract, the transactions, the dependency – the alchemy, the *secret*, the astral journeys, the *mystery*.

But you and I, A, do not know. My romantic ideal, for which reason I cannot even play dress-up with my history – I have *nearly* married, but find it impossible to even play at calling any of my past lovers *wives*. (Can I call my past selves *I*?)

Again I return to the philosopher X’s definition of love: *it is to be ready for everything*.

Milestība, love. From the IE **mei-* : **mi-*, “tender, soft, beloved.”

The demons found in such a blissful thing, figures in cold pursuit, convections, theatricality, annihilation of self, clinging, a dance of death, even. And when the *otherness* is ruined, the alien nature? (“Our sense of the tragic waxes and wanes with the sensual.”) Forgiveness?

To be ready for *everything*, not anything. Everything, a whole. (Lie back, my totalitarian love.)

Germain on Crosby: “He extends this protective anonymity to almost everyone. Even chance acquaintances become ‘S’ or ‘E’ or, at the most explicit, ‘Lady A’.” It is interesting how I. becomes I in these pages – “I became my assistant” – at first I thought of finding her another letter, to lessen the confusion, but then accepted this occasional “infernal discrepancy” – *that is how close we were. Were we? Are we?*

I intend to work the Magick of Abramelin the Mage here, someday, someday soon, the version given in *The Vision and the Voice*, isolating myself utterly with increasing ardor, depriving myself of the extraneous factors and conditions that obscure () – I have been alone here, for the first time in my life, spending weeks in the Svente woods, far from electric power, drawing water from the well, working the fire, the breath, walking in the forest, sleeping in a silence broken only by the occasional wild animal.

And yet I am a person of such densities and confusions. Forgiveness? Or I have caught more purity in a dream, or in a lover’s eyes, though the changes wrought in enforced solitude were profound – washing the poisons from the body. I also worked rituals there – my first work with the Enochian calls, sinister sexual workings in the forest, chthonic activity...

And, once, I found *her*, long long after I had “left her,” (*we can always leave, can't we*) – clear and tangible between a dream and dawn, bedewed, open.

A writes: *it's not that i think you find insanity attractive per se, but i must ask you why you don't find it pointedly unattractive. (you've heard this before from me*

H was in a hospital when my astral form reached her, then, in the woods – green tiles.

Most types of “sanity” are more unattractive than insanity. (Why does A choose the word *unattractive*?)

“Conscious desire is unattractive.” (Austin Osman Spare) Or does she mean *not pretty*?

I do not know of its prettiness – its hideous beauty I *do* know. Consensual reality is accursed, not insanity (but I would lose the word *insanity* as well – here, with H, it is *lunacy* – she is *mehnessehrdsiga* – it is very much lunar) (Roget's offers almost two pages, ranging from ‘demented’ and ‘corybantic insanity’ to Milton's “moping melancholy and moonstruck madness.” Best, the thesaurus quotes Aristotle: “No excellent soul is exempt from a mixture of madness.” [True, even if Papa Pedant is no buddy of mine.]) The things that bind us to reality, to a second-hand, slavish, repulsive world of false responsibilities and rote behaviour, the bonds that make slaves out of us, accountants headed gloriously for the retirement village with our sane and slavish daughters and a “practical” view of things, bloated with opinions (“and buses full of small, captured animals / being transported to an empty book” RK) are far filthier than *madness*, are fashioned out of fear, on the one hand shunning the grave (its gravity) and on the other hand confirming it, ignoring eternity. *Passion transgresses*. Passion is suffering. “Beauty will be convulsive or *will not be*.”

+ + +

Bright sun after a cold night, returning exhausted after a night and a day with H, sleeping in my jacket (*kurtka*) rather than remain awake waiting for embers to seal into the old, crumbling Swedish furnace (they are round towers of bricks encased in sheet metal – you arrange the wood and open the flue, shut both flue and door after the little blue flames cease their dance over the coals...) – Cockcrow, jackdaws. The neighbour keeps carrier pigeons – they wheel over the garden, high over the garden, somehow always between the sun and the eyes, the light through their wings, the whirring sound.

She had gone to see O. I told O for the first time *explicitly* how I love H, how no one I touch gives or is given what we share, the unutterable bliss (that it *is* as yet unutterable – “the work of love is to find the words that will make it love” [Joris] an infinity within a few hours yesterday, “where time is shrivelled down to time's seed corn” [EP], in which this this this this accursed reflexive analysis came at last to an end – the *lift*, to be lifted from it, to lift oneself this this this this *self* to lift, the swimmer, in the light streaming from your eyes [a *reflection* you saw, a *reflection* of self] but to *lift* oneself onto the shore [“Manchild, she said...”] from the ink where ineradicable demons swim in sinister arabesques / *is it*

UBI AMOR, IBI OCULIS EST

it is

.

The *sweet look*, love, and her words transmit the vision – *innate, anew* – as if I can feed on her music alone, as if touch itself is eyesight – “Behold mine adoration maketh me clear” – adoration of her form and winged words that take the breath away, return it adream, of such freshness, odor of lavender-scented cotton torn from the line and draped hurriedly over the bed before leaping, there, to dance softly wildly into those parts of the body where the self falls finally silent and substance is born anew – how I used to stare at a reproduction of Gustave Moreau’s painting where the muse whispers into the ear of a poet and see *her*, precisely her, the distance of the lips from the lobe, the mysterious verbs that *release me* as a drizzle in the hoary lilacs releases their heavenly fragrance. It is *here*, paradise. Wouldst thou own it?

Trembling, afterward. “What I feel of my old sadness is a shining blue-like body in my body.” (Stein) The scales and barnacles covering the abdomen fall away. Her touch is burning memory, the dark woods are aflame. The maps remain, the charts showing the tentative paths to some contrived treasure, buried rocks, interred pain mistaken for rubies.

Wouldst thou own it, wouldst thou promise to reach beyond whatever selfish drudgery in *the old life*, does it return? Does it return, feelings like swarms of vermin, half-thoughts, divorced opposites dressed in hard words, destructive insects bearing the kind of knowledge that results in sorrow only, shoves the breath down into depraved genitals, hisses in the heart, twists the brain like a dwarf tree bearing tiny, poisonous fruit, a bush whose berries deform the menstrual cycle, dead animals microwaved and served up at some fluorescent restaurant furnished in plastic, darkened eyes staring into gaps that are not some sainted emptiness but an abyss between sour time and half-hearted industry, servers with forced smiles walking in circles among such dreary love songs, God an abusive father flashing out of a cloud at orgasm, dark blue water in a series of toilets, still, blanketed stink, pink toilet paper, all affection ownership, every inspiration madness, any devotion only security, until it is swept into death, and even death...

+ + +

For the third time, I try to tell I that I must leave, that we cannot be together – and again we end in a state of suspended emotion, her crying from the depths of her soul, deeper, from some opened juncture at her *basis*, for hours, animal, despondent as something poised over a fetid chasm, its legs stiffly stretched, paws lacerated by what it *held* for year after year as *ground*, the most awful gut-wrenching wailings and all for *me*, what me, what me is this that is never there for her, why is it not there, when must we be there for one another, what is that *troth* – beneath her harsh words, she bears only love for me, and it is exactly the total love... I crave to *feel* in such a prolonged and *certain way / not this love*, not from her, the animal plunges into the chasm o why o why can she not be *human*, crave to feel *in myself* so cloudless / but it is only there, only there, were I not going away she would clutch her pain again, her conviction that she is born to suffer, now that I am capable of making things *good*, can’t you make

things good, please please please make things good - - - - silence - - - - and after my silence, *then I will, I will* and *she waited for me, waited for me for all of this time*, waited, *changing* herself, ill, her letters unanswered except in the beginning when I promised to work things out *or wanted her*, wanted this creature *I know*, the only one who knows *me*, wrote and *promised* “and then you sent another letter and all your promises had changed, and again I believed them – and I *waited* and when you came you were *cold* to me and I had been sick a month, in pain...” *We are little animals*, she used to say, small defenceless animals. *I try to tell I that I must leave*. How does one tell I that I must? Can I? And at times the wailings transcend the pain and I can see through what we did what I did to her what I did – see into *what?* To try again? To try again, the heart heavy with clouds and *intolerable bonds*, her constant threats of suicide – *Why am I seeing this? Why must I see this?* – This is some barbaric child of my own *lies*, of having ever asked her to wait? *And when it was clear?* When I returned here from the moon, and she had seen everything in her dreams? And again, now, I am trying to convince her to *breathe*, to let go of this pain, to let go, *let go*, lift your hands and let it go – she said she could, now, during the day, while all night she dreams me (*I don't dream you anymore*) and then the terrors come rushing back – what am I doing, why did we make this place, why am I destroying this garden – *this beauty we made*, the first earth I have ever had, raised things in, flowers mostly, irises, irises everywhere now, *irides*, and the way we *knew* one another... Past tense?! *So few*, so few times when we *found one another*, and all of those periods in which the one looked while the other rotted or ran – and then she touched a dead spider, carefully placing it on a stone – and I saw her *world* again, her secret world into which I came, her struggle with her paintings, months and months figuring them out in her head, the space, the tones, the strange entrances into a *vision* – and I can turn away from this? From someone who has so forgiven me, from a being who has loved only me for year after year, survived my ambiguities? She told me that she did not blame me for what happened – *then* – when, after I betrayed myself and H (not H, not H, how can I betray someone who could not *imagine* us... I betrayed my own love, *merely* my own love / and it is – *mere?* – Illusion – oh the *fear*, to trudge again through the self's only vast vistas, depersonalised remorse, salt marshes stretching under heavy skies, eyes blighted, sightless, a house full of bric-a-brac, the once loved objects – and the *future?* To be paralysed, not knowing if I can drag myself back here – would I? Would it be a lie? And my vision darkens, other old curses floating up around what had been so clear, (could we stay friends, I do love you, please, breathe, please, I, breathe) – *she does not love you*, I said of H, *she only wants to weave her webs* – and on the one hand H has told me that it was true, that she could no longer believe in her own happiness, that she was determined to destroy herself, that she did not see the others she drew into her, *forcing* them to love her? And when I see again her hysteria, when dark air whirls around her swathing everything, losing her to me... this surrounds the certainty I see in her when she opens to me, the constant telepathic contact we share *when we are to one another* / it is *me, me, me* – only my reflection – isn't it? *Losing her to me*.

The chestnuts are in bloom. The old man is rounding the corner. The ancient streetcars screech around the great curve in Red Army Street, raising dust, the dead birds in the meat store there are scrawny, blue, the shelf lined with bottles of vodka, the lemon vodka tinted in an abominable yellow, cadmium. The woods beyond into which the tramway plunges, as if they too were part of the sinister city, in midwinter especially it is a surreal transmutation, row after row of identical buildings, then

suddenly the snowy woods, a few scanty cemeteries, then pine barrens, then a cathedral of pine trees as far as the eye can see.

+ + +

And so, after staring into a boiling mirror the colour of dog's blood, into the horror I made (oh but that is to *be* here – the Oath of the Abyss, as *everything that happens is a message* – but *everything*) (not anything, not only the lovely, poisonous flowers wreath the maypole – *little blue shoes*, aconite, behind the house) – I am seeing / not only what I have made, but what there is to see /

on a clear day, the poplar seeds as thick as a *larks' blizzard*, (less of them now, they troubled the images of important men by sticking to their dark suits and were felled by the city, this same city that used to buy the feet of jackdaws to thin their population, which exceeds that of human beings though not that of *souls*, the Jews in mass graves on the road to Mezciems, the Gypsies buried under Pyervomayskaya, the microregion virtually treeless.)

Author's Note:

The Penetralium is a work in progress that was begun in 1998. There are various quotations scattered throughout the text. A few are attributed, others not; like Nathaniel Tarn in his LYRICS FOR THE BRIDE OF GOD, a book much in mind, I would like to name some of the writers who helped to form my mental climate during the period of writing (and before and beyond it) — first and foremost, my friend and teacher Robert Kelly, to whom the work is dedicated. Others include Robert Podgurski, George Quasha, Kenneth Irby, Pat Smith, Harvey Bialy, Gerrit Lansing, Charles Stein, Clayton Eshleman, Paul Auster, Duncan McNaughton, Kathy Acker, André Breton, Ezra Pound, Baudelaire, Alejandra Pizarnik, Strindberg, Austin Osman Spare, Aleister Crowley, Kenneth Grant, Linda Falorio, Nietzsche, H.P. Lovecraft, Louis Martinie, Robert Duncan, Hermann Hesse, Nerval, Robbe-Grillet, Michael Palmer, Cathleen Shattuck, Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, Artaud, Rimbaud, Harry Crosby, John Dee and Edward Kelley, Lautréamont, John Crowley, Hans Bellmer and Malcolm Lowry.

See also, Robert Kelly, “The Flight of the Crows,” *Archipelago* Vol. 2, No. 3.

THREE TALMUDIC TALES OF VIRTUE AND VICE¹

David Cooper

First

A betrothed couple were kidnapped by heathens
who married them to each other.
On their wedding night said she to him, “don’t touch me:
you haven’t given me a *ketubah*”;²

and from that day to the day he died he didn’t.
At his funeral she told the assembled,
“mourn this man who, even more than Joseph,
controlled his desires. Joseph

never shared his bed with his temptress, but this man did;
Joseph wasn’t married to her, but this man was.”

Second

40 bushels of grain were being sold for a *dinar*,
but one of them went missing.

An investigation revealed the thief and his son
had deflowered a betrothed virgin on Yom Kipur.

Father and son were caught, tried, and stoned to death,
and the original price was restored.

Third

A guy whose *ketubah* stipulated a huge cash settlement
wanted to divorce his wife without paying up.
So he got all his men-servants drunk, put them in her bed,

smearing egg white all over them, called witnesses,
and brought his case to court. But one of the judges,
Baba ben Buta of the school of Shammai, said Shammai taught:

when broiled, egg white contracts but semen becomes faint.
The evidence tested as predicted and the court ordered
the fellow be flogged and pay his wife in full.

Epilogue

One rabbi asked another, “I can see why the second and third were punished,
but why did the virtuous one have to suffer so?”
“Because he didn’t mourn for Jerusalem, as is written:
*Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all who love her,
rejoice for joy with all that mourn her.*”³

¹Sources: *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin* (the tractate on divorce), p. 57A; final couplet: *Isaiah* 66:10.

²“Ketubah” = marriage contract, which is a requirement at a Jewish wedding.

³ The reference to Jerusalem in the last stanza is a red herring; the key words here are “rejoice” and “joy”: the rabbis disapprove of joyless marriages and lives of quiet desperation.

Reminiscence

LEE GOERNER

Editor and Publisher (1947-1995)

Literary history, of which publishing is only a part, is marvelous and fluid. The publishing of books is itself a curious undertaking. In Europe and America, the organization, financing, distribution, and expectation of profit of the industry; that is, its entire structure, scarcely resembles what it was a dozen, or even half a dozen, years ago. The 'accidental profession' of an older generation, with its good manners and care for literature, has been all but replaced by corporate publishing, which banks on the mass-entertainment values of a media-based 'global' culture.

Substantially, however, what has changed? Do people read more bad books than ever? Fewer good books? Why should a marketer's opinion matter at an editorial meeting? What has become of the editor's art?

I thought I would ask certain notable book people what they thought about these matters, and they have been telling me, at length. Our conversations appear regularly in Archipelago, and may serve as an opening onto an institutional memory contrasting itself with the current establishment, reflecting on its glories, revealing what remains constant amid the present flux. Despite their surround of gentility, these publishers are strong-minded characters engaged with their historical circumstances. Out of that engagement have appeared a number of books that we can say, rightly, belong to literature.

-Katherine McNamara

What has become of the editor? This is a more intimate question than I have asked before. I will write of a man I knew well, Lee Goerner, formerly at Alfred A. Knopf, latterly the last editor and publisher at Atheneum, and my husband. Though relatively young at his death, he was of that 'old school' now eclipsed. In a sense, historical circumstances overcame him.

Atheneum, founded in 1959 by Pat Knopf, Michael Bessie, and Hiram Hayden, had merged (as Michael Bessie has recounted) with Scribner's by 1978. When Lee Goerner became its publisher, in 1989, Atheneum was owned by Robert Maxwell, the notorious British capitalist; the imprint belonged to Maxwell's American publishing corporation which also held Macmillan, Scribner's (as it was still called), The Free Press, Collier Books, and technical branches. In 1991, Robert Maxwell died amid questionable circumstances. As his English holdings were bankrupt, the American corporation was put up for sale to cover costs. For two or more years Atheneum and its publisher labored under a cloud of uncertainty while rumors of imminent sale destabilized his publishing program. When at last the new owners were announced to be Simon & Schuster, the news was a blow to him, because he saw their corporate philosophy and practices as antithetical to his own.

Simon & Schuster had recently been bought by Paramount Pictures (and tried on the short-lived corporate identity of "Paramount Publishing"). Paramount Pictures

had itself been bought by the enormous Viacom, owned by Sumner Redstone. It is à propos that I write of this now, as Redstone has just bought the CBS corporation. A thorough reorganization of this bivalved new conglomerate is promised, under an executive with no publishing experience; Simon & Schuster (deep in whose vaults lie the remains not only of Atheneum but also the old Scribner's) is rumored to be for sale again.

There is a warmer reason, however, for remembering Lee Goerner in these pages: to mark the appearance of Lynne Tillman's *BOOKSTORE*, telling the life and times of Jeanette Watson and Books & Co. In Manhattan, for twenty years Books & Co. was a delight to both serious and fashionable readers, until historical circumstances, once again, led to its closing. Many writers have given readings in that wonderful bookstore. I remember very well the night Isabel Allende read from *THE STORIES OF EVA LUNA*, her fourth book, published by Atheneum, where her editor and friend, Lee Goerner, had gone from Knopf. The upstairs room was crowded, and the crowd was expectant. Lee, who was to introduce her, did not care for public speaking. He was a slender, finely-dressed man who did nothing to call attention to himself, while observing the scene from behind his glasses and plotting his getaway. His voice was quiet, unemphatic; there was mordant humor in it, and, often, tenderness.

*Lee Goerner introduces Isabel Allende
at Books & Co., 1991*

“I first read Isabel Allende eight years ago in rather extraordinary circumstances. I was working at another publishing house at the time, and we received the Spanish language edition of the book you know as *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS*. No one knew anything about this writer, the agent didn't explain much about this writer, and all we had was the book and a rather charming photograph of this very attractive young woman. Since I was the only person at that house who read Spanish, it fell to me to read the book. And I took it over on a Friday afternoon to Carl Schurz Park and read the first chapter over a couple of hours — my Spanish was rustier than it is now — and I thought, This is OK. I then went home and proceeded to do some more homework over the weekend. As the week went by — I can tell this now, I would never have told Isabel before — it took me a week to get back to the book. I read some more in Carl Schurz Park on a Saturday, and then I stayed home all day Sunday; and I'd begun to get drawn in to the story, all the magical events. Then I stayed home Monday — I didn't go into the office until I finished the book — my Spanish was getting better all the time — and I went to Bob Gottlieb, who was then head of the distinguished house of Knopf, and I said, 'I don't know anything about her, you don't know anything about her, but this is the book we have to publish.' He looked at me and blinked. He said, 'Well, OK.' We were extremely lucky in this regard because, as we found out later, three other North American houses had turned down this book. And as I said, that book was *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS*, and I'm sure that's where you first heard about Isabel Allende.”

From *BOOKSTORE The Life and Times of Jeanette Watson and Books & Co.*,
by Lynne Tillman
(New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999)

Lee in Retrospect

Katherine McNamara

When Lee Goerner was a young man he lived for two years in a small apartment on Laguna Street in San Francisco. By day he worked in a cigar store. By night he wrote a novel. A year later he finished the novel, read it over, decided it wasn't good enough and burned it. Tired of his own company, he abandoned the writer's solitary existence; but he wanted to be in books. He drove his VW Bug back across the country, spent six months looking for a job, and entered publishing as a junior assistant at Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Someone asked me if he really had burned the manuscript. He must have; it was not among his papers. I thought I had found it; no, it was the translation of Isabel Allende's first novel, *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS*. He had read her book in manuscript, bought it, and then so disliked the translator's work (and worked with another on the subsequent books he published) that he rewrote much of it. Of his writings known to me, these exist: an elegant newspaper piece about Machado de Assis, whom he admired almost as much as he admired Chekhov, which was a very great deal; and hundreds of letters, scattered among writers and other friends across the country. The ones I've read are good: the tone is distanced, balanced, never too personal. The editor disliked talking about himself. An English publisher wrote me that unlike most Americans Lee understood irony, and knew how to 'deploy' it. During his five years at Atheneum he published between eighty and a hundred books, most of them novels, nearly all edited by him. He used to say he stayed in publishing because he liked the writers – liked their company, liked listening to them, and working with them. He loved editing. He loved books, even physically: their heft and color, binding stamp, rough trim.

After his death, oftentimes one of his writers would phone me. We would talk about this and that, life going on, until there came a pause, a long breath held. One of us – I, probably – mentioned Lee's name. The listening writer was silent for a kind moment, a steady heartbeat, then said: I think about him a lot. He's not here, but I find his mark everywhere – books he sent me, a note, tapes he made.

We consoled ourselves with those brief, intent moments of attention to memory and objects. We could not, for a long time, quite comprehend his absence, even as we learned of other deaths, lost friends, as we learned to live with our own illnesses and the terrible insecurities brought down by on us by the corporations that direct our life. Someone remarked: I'm cataloging deaths among our generation: the AIDS deaths, and this other kind. We began to understand – not our 'mortality': we don't know what that is; we understood: "I didn't return his call, now I can't"; and, no more lunches marked by his humor and irony and high gossip about publishing; and, *He's not here*. The physicality of his absence was what surprised us.

One day he named a novelist whose work, though acclaimed, he didn't care for, though he didn't say why. He never liked to give 'reasons' for his choices – he thought such things were after-the-fact reductions of emotion not easily, perhaps not wisely, articulated: although, once when we were speaking about how popular fiction, the movies, and the news seemed like variants of each other, he said, in a rare pronouncement: "You cannot deduce motivation from action." If he was stubborn about what he liked, he worked from a carefully-wrought aesthetic. During his first freshman week at Cornell, he sat down in the undergraduate library and read *GRAVITY'S*

RAINBOW, DON QUIXOTE, and THE LABYRINTH OF SOLITUDE. He thought the purpose of a university education was for reading books, not talking about them, not taking them apart out loud, in front of strangers. Formally, he studied history, not literature; literature was a creature you had best come to on your own. In fact he studied Black history; this was in the late '60s, then the early 1970s, for graduate school at the University of California at Davis, and the war was on. He studied Black history, he read Spanish, he went to movies, he hated the war. He was an angry young man; it took him a long time to learn to live with his anger, then to go past it.

I don't know if he read Cervantes and Paz in Spanish that freshman week. He could have. He read and spoke Spanish: he had first encountered it in high school, in Venezuela. He said once that listening to Spanish had been like overhearing his mother-language, from the first the words seeming half-remembered, warm, as with friendship and knowledge. Later, he was one of the two or three book editors in New York who read Spanish. The formidable Catalan agent Carmen Balcells told me that in the early '80s, when Lee came to Barcelona (then, as now, the conduit-point for Latin American literature), the writers and editors thought he had brought them the publishing version of the Marshall Plan. Carmen Balcells gave a reception in his honor to which everyone came. Lee stood in a corner and blinked when anyone approached him.

He loved movies, and was interested in writings about movies. In the early 1980s, I'd guess, he read an article by an English film critic named David Thomson about Warren Beatty, and, excited by this writer who was new to him, showed it to Robert Gottlieb, then editor-in-chief of Knopf. To his intense disappointment, Gottlieb wouldn't let him buy David Thomson's book. Later, Gottlieb became David's publisher and Lee, his editor. Powerful older men often thwart gifted, rising young men – the young bucks who challenge the alpha stag, but cannot (not yet) vanquish him? Perhaps Lee himself turned into that stag. He encouraged some very smart young women coming up in publishing – he liked intelligent women as persons, and wasn't afraid of them – but I observed several young men who carried battle-marks after working with him. "They're full of themselves," he would say; and – this, more and more often – "They don't know how to read." He wondered when he heard young editors talk about going out to clubs at night. "When do they edit manuscripts?" he asked. Nearly all his adult life he spent his evenings reading manuscripts. He had that high shoulder you get from years of carrying a heavy briefcase home from the office.

He began at Knopf in 1973, as a very junior assistant to Robert Gottlieb. Among the first books he was given to edit was Michael Herr's DISPATCHES. When Michael Herr turned in the manuscript, no one at Knopf knew how to edit that hyped-up rock-and-roll language. Lee hovered in the hallway by Gottlieb's office, his face glowing. Gloria Emerson, the war correspondent, watched him and said, "Give it to that young man." DISPATCHES, a report of the war that poisoned our generation, was Lee's first big book. The war didn't leave him; one of the last books he published at Atheneum was ACHILLES IN VIETNAM.

DISPATCHES ends:

"I saw a picture of a North Vietnamese soldier sitting in the same spot on the Danang River where the press center had been, where we'd sat smoking and joking and going, 'Too much!' and 'Far out!' and 'Oh my God it gets so freaky out there!' He looked so unbelievably peaceful, I knew that somewhere that night and every night there'd be people sitting together over there talking about the bad old days of jubilee and that one of them would remember and say, Yes, never mind, there were some nice

ones, too. And no moves left for me at all but to write down some few last words and make the dispersion, Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there."

In late 1988, soon after we married, we were at dinner with Carol Janeway, his old friend at Knopf, who is also a fine translator, and her husband Erwin Glickes (d. 1994), who directed The Free Press. They knew that Lee was looking to leave Knopf (when I first knew him he said he wished he could have a year off), and Erwin asked if he would like to consider coming to Atheneum. At the time, like The Free Press, Atheneum was an imprint at Maxwell-Macmillan. Lee said yes. When he started at Atheneum he told me that he expected to have five years there – not that he meant to stay just that long; it was a different sense of timing; and he was right, almost to the month. In January 1994, the new corporate owners decided that respected literary imprint should no longer exist (profits were said not to be high enough) and its editor would have no place in the new order. He persuaded them to let him publish his spring list. Atheneum ceased to exist on June 30, 1994. The last title he published, wonderfully, was John Hale's *THE CIVILIZATION OF EUROPE IN THE RENAISSANCE*. He had nearly another year: his year off. He listened to opera, read piles of books, watched movies, talked on the phone, went to lunch, napped in the afternoon. We traveled, and took walks. He didn't wake at three a.m. so often anymore.

He must have lived with his own death, which announced itself as he began at Knopf. A physical exam was required. He learned then that he had juvenile diabetes. It was an inexorable disease; ameliorated, not cured. He was a Stoic; he faced the shadow, without flinching, until the end.

One day – I think it was during the unsettling year before Atheneum was shut down – he and Thomas Pynchon were saying goodbye after lunching together, when Pynchon took him lightly, affectionately, by the lapels and half-growled, "Only publish good books!" Lee did not reply; perhaps feeling he did not have to. When, later, sturdily, I defended Pynchon's plea, he exclaimed, perhaps in despair, "That's easy for him to say."

A week or so before he died he had lunch with a younger editor whom he had befriended over the years. They talked about publishing and the state it had come to. Recalling the conversation, he look disturbed, almost hurt, then indignant. "He said I was cynical. But I'm not cynical: and you know why?" He tapped my knee, for emphasis. "Because I've never done anything for my own advantage."

He loved Chekhov's letters, though not the plays; many of the stories, however. A day or two after he died a piece of paper floated up; two passages on Knopf note paper, probably once scotch-taped to the wall above his typewriter.

Chekhov to a friend:

"In general, I am finding life tedious and, at times, I begin to hate it – something that never happened to me before. Lengthy, stupid conversations, guests, people asking me for favors, handouts of a ruble or two rubles, or three, having to pay cabbies for patients who don't give me a cent – in a word, everything is so balled up that one might as well run out of the house. People borrow money from me and don't pay it back, walk off with my books and don't consider my time of any value. The only thing lacking is an unrequited love."

Chekhov to S.N. Plescheyev, May 14, 1889:

"Write me a letter, my dear. I love your writing; when I see it, I grow cheerful. Besides, I shall not hide it from you, my correspondence with you flatters me. Your

letters and Suvorin's I treasure and shall bequeathe to my grandchildren: let the sons of bitches read them and know what went on in times long past."

Books and Authors mentioned:

Michael Herr, DISPATCHES
 Isabel Allende, THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS; THE STORIES OF EVA LUNA
 THE SELECTED LETTERS OF ANTON CHEKHOV, ed. Lillian Hellman
 Machado de Assis, DOM CASMURRO; PHILOSOPHER OR DOG?;
 EPITAPH OF A SMALL WINNER
 Octavio Paz, THE LABYRINTH OF SOLITUDE
 Cervantes, DON QUIXOTE
 Thomas Pynchon, GRAVITY'S RAINBOW
 David Thomson, WARREN BEATY AND DESERT EYES; SUSPECTS;
 DICTIONARY OF FILM BIOGRAPHY
 Lynne Tillman, BOOKSTORE
 Jonathan Shay, MD, PhD, ACHILLES IN VIETNAM
 John Hale, THE CIVILIZATION OF EUROPE IN THE RENAISSANCE

Among the authors and translators edited by Lee Goerner:

Isabel Allende, Max Apple, John Avedon, Cheryll Aimee Barron, Elizabeth Benedict, John Berger, William Betcher M.D., Anne Billson, James Bishop, Jr., Robert Olen Butler, James Campbell, Benjamin Cheever, James Colbert, Jim Crace, Robert Cullen, Kiana Davenport, Thulani Davis, Don DeLillo, James Dickenson, Ivan Doig, Sergei Dovlatov, Jennie Fields, Robert Fisk, Jonathan Freedman, Sarah Gaddis, William Gaddis, Gabriel García Márquez, James Preston Girard, Lesley Glaister, Laurel Goldman, Phyllis Grosskurth, Edith Grossman, Jay Gummerman, John Hale, Stephen Harrigan, Tommy Hays, Michael Herr, Linda Hogan, Andrew Hurley, Samuel Hynes, Charles Johnson, Lieve Joris, Helen Elaine Lee, Osman Lins, Hilary Mantel, Linda Hogan, Paule Marshall, Joseph McElroy, Tom Miller, Alanna Nash, John Nichols, Tom Nolan, Michael Ondaatje, Roberto Pazzi, Margaret Sayers Peden, Joan Perucho, Nérida Piñon, William Pollack M.D., Abel Posse, Reynolds Price, Ishmael Reed, Augusto Roa Bastos, Howard Rodman, Richard Schickel, Helen Schulman, Jonathan Shay, M.D., Ph.D., Richard Slotkin, Randall E. Stross, Elizabeth Tallent, David Thomson, Rose Tremain, João Ubaldo Ribeiro, Sebastiano Vassalli, Armando Valladares, Sara Vogan, Geoffrey Wheatcroft, Edmund White, Richard Wiley, Carter Wilson, David Winn, Larry Woiwode, Nancy Wood, Rudolph Wurlitzer

See also:

A Conversation with Marion Boyars, *Archipelago* Vol. 1, No. 3
 A Conversation with Cornelia and Michael Bessie, Vol. 1, No. 4; Vol. 2, No. 1
 A Conversation with William Strachan, Vol 2, No. 4
 A Conversation with Samuel H. Vaughan, Vol. 3, No. 2
 Books & Co. News at Turtle Point Press <<http://www.turtlepoint.com/booksco/booksco.html>>

Errol Miller

LATER YOU MAY SAY HOW

the circumstances were. Somewhere it is written.
All the good fat land needs is use and respect.
Imagine the discreet pull of something
summoning us to impasse, forever in motion,
trembling across the guardrail at Niagara.

Our personal lives are bombarded with fiction.
Some say "wow," soaking it into psyche.
Perhaps it is remaining as half-life, perhaps
art will mediate a formal discipline
so that we may cast off too much "experience."

I, too, am working on the verge of new directions.
There are, of course, limitations upon the land.
Soon it will be nude November with falling leaves.
Soon ol' mates from Zion will salute my memory.
Soon I'll have a regular job.

Giving voice to so many Americas,
navigating a forest of wisteria and crepe-myrtle
in search of true-vine literature, Very well,
I may say, summoning a willing maiden,
calling home to Mama, calling out to Sasha.

Whispers of earthly delight, some incorrect.
What place does sanity have in place, really?
A sprinkling of rain may slow the destruction
of tomorrow, may even save the Opera House
and the households of those in prayer.

Yet there are several endings.
The newsprint of morning is bursting with rage.
We are all anointed with different creamy salve,
living different stories, telling them differently
in the firefight of man's bumble-bee demise.

This side of Chicago
our heads are rather drunk with imperfection,
on the Gulf a Palace of Smoke Light transforms
from the ordinary into communal magic.
Awake and have a cup of green tea.

Different kinds of exorcism
but above all things a sequence.
Contemplate what lies behind and before us.
Address the love-starved pine porches
of a dilapidated nation in descent.

The prettiest rainbow
hovering over Star City and the horses
stamping impatient and rowdy hometown tenants
pushing and shoving, breathing hard,
demanding things in their places.

SEVEN POEMS IN HEBREW

Rachel Eshed
tr. David Cooper

Rain and Deceit

In every city a strange man
waits for her, sad and circumspect as her childhood
cypress growing in the courtyard of the house,
he offers her a home.
Her docile voice tells her to enter,
her inner voice,
she need only choose,
to soar
on a cloud as transparent as a lie
in the corner of her eye.
She can truly believe
in this;
she invests the better part of her power
in this;
puzzling ruses struggle
to come out, as at a parting hour
she learned to prolong and cut short,
in the depths of her delusion.

גשם וכזב

בכל עיר מחכה לה
 גבר זר, עגמומי וזהיר כברוש
 ילדותה, צומח בחצר הבית,
 מציע לה בית.
 קולה הציטן אומר לה לבוא
 קולה הפנימי
 היא צריכה רק לבחר
 להמריא
 דרך ענו שקוף כשקר
 שבזוית עינה
 היא באמת יכולה להאמין
 בזה
 היא משקיעה בזה את מיטב
 אונה
 תחבולות תמוהות מפרכסות
 לצאת כמו בשעת פרידה
 היא למדה להאריך ולקצר
 בתהומות ההזיה.

Colorful As Ever

There's no supervision, no control, the dead will be spared
all this sweat. Afterwards there'll be a foggy
morning again, merciful grasses will sprout
wild roots, the smell of the apple colorful
as ever, parrots screeching in uncontrollable anger,
an eternal forest's darkness, amazing butterflies masquerading
as leaves, secrets of the pleasure that will suddenly come again
will rouse and arouse me until I no longer desire
and awake from my sleep.

ססגוני מתמיד

אין בקרת ואין בקרה, מן המתיים תחסוף
 כל הנעה הזאת, אתרי-כן יהיה שוב
 בקר ערפלי, דשאים רחומים יצמיחו
 שרש-פרא, ריחו של התפוח ססגוני
 מתמיד, תכיים צונחים בחמה שפוכה,
 אפלת-יער-עד, פרפרי פלא מתחפשים
 לעלים, מסתרי-העדנה שתבוא פתע שוב
 יעירו ויעוררו עד שלא אחפץ עוד
 ואקום משנתי.

Like A High Priestess

Like a High Priestess I mix colors
on the floor. Lots of men are laid out
at my feet like fine carpets.
Lots of men want to live in my breath
but my breath isn't there.
They breathe on my nape and tell me
Enter, they groan in a tempest of tight
jeans. They'll never smile at me,
I'm not a party to their transgression.
When I stumble they offer me
a clumsy hand, or
a quickie.
I bend over night after night in my thin mini
dress and make my bed.
They can't even see
my clit or grab my
ass. These are truly two of the wonders
of the world; they don't realize
what they're missing when they're not
laid out at my feet like fine carpets.

כְּכֹהֵנֶת גְּדוּלָה

כְּכֹהֵנֶת גְּדוּלָה אָנִי מְעַרְבֶּבֶת צְבָעִים
 עַל הָרִצְפָּה. הַרְבֵּה גְּבָרִים מְטָלִים
 לְמַרְגְּלוֹתַי כְּשִׁטְיָחִים שֶׁל יָפִי.
 הַרְבֵּה גְּבָרִים רוֹצִים לְדוֹר בְּנִשְׁמָתִי
 אֲךָ נִשְׁמָתִי אֵינְנָה שָׁם.
 הֵם נוֹשְׁפִים בְּעַרְפִּי וְאוֹמְרִים לִי
 תִּכְנְסִי, גּוֹנְחִים בְּסַעֲרַת־גִּינְסִים
 הַדּוֹקִים. לְעוֹלָם לֹא יִחִיכּוּ אֵלַי,
 אֵינְנִי שֹׁתֶפֶה לְדַבְר־עֲבָרְתָם.
 כְּשֶׁאֲנִי מוֹעֵדֶת הֵם מְצִיעִים לִי
 יָד מְסֻרְבֶּלֶת, אוֹ
 לְשֹׁכֵב מִיָּד.
 אָנִי גּוֹחֶנֶת עָרֵב עָרֵב בְּשִׁמְלַת־הַמִּינִי
 הַדְּקָה וּמְצִיעָה אֶת מִטְתִּי.
 הֵם אֵינָם כְּדֵי לְרֹאוֹת
 לִי אֶת הַדְּגֻדְגָן אוֹ לְאַחֵז לִי
 בִּישְׁבוֹן. אֵלֶּה בְּאֵמַת שְׁנֵי פְּלָאִי־
 עוֹלָם, הֵם לֹא תוֹפְסִים
 מִשֶּׁהֵם מְפַסִּידִים כְּשֶׁאֵינָם
 מְטָלִים לְמַרְגְּלוֹתַי כְּשִׁטְיָחִים שֶׁל יָפִי.

Now Sleep

1

Things no one
praises.
Hallucinatory landscapes,
a blot on my brow and my tired
hands.
Three little blunders
die.

2

An electric current but more delicate
on the soles of my feet, and a kind of sudden joy
that I have a bed, that my palms are whole,
and also unblemished and fine.
Shshsh, now sleep, blind
like a young child's dream.

עכשיו שינה

1

דברים שאין מדברים בהם
 נכבדות.
 נופים הזויים,
 כתם על מצחי וידי
 יגעות.
 שלש טעיות קטנות
 מתות.

2

זרם של חשמל אבל יותר עדין
 בכפות הרגלים, ומין שמחת-פתאם
 שיש לי מטה, שכפותי שלמות,
 וגם חפות מדפי ויפות.
 שיש, עכשו שנה, ענרת
 כחלום של ילד רף.

"The Frightened Pubic Mound"

The frightened pubic mound
denuded by lies
in pain's crotch,
the thorns separated from the cotton,
I've been there and back;
why do these twisted hallucinations
subdue me, soothe
me, raise me, my back
to the wall a moment before the shooting,
my hands in the air, I
surrender, I'm not here at all,
just don't hurt me sir,
I'm innocent,
I haven't done anything,
Take pity, pity.



תְּלוּלִית הָעֶרְוָה הַמִּפְחָדָת
 הָעִירְמָה מִשְׁקָרִים
 אֲשֶׁר בְּמִפְשַׁעַת הַכָּאֵב,
 הַקּוֹצִים הַנִּפְלִים מִן הַמוֹד,
 הַיִּיתִי שֵׁם וְגַם חֹזְרִתִי
 מִדּוֹעַ הַהֲזִיזוֹת הַנִּפְתָּלוֹת הַלָּלוּ
 מְכַנְיַעוֹת אוֹתִי, מְרַגֵּיעוֹת
 אוֹתִי, מְעַמִּידוֹת אוֹתִי וְגַבִּי
 אֶל הַקִּיר, רָגַע לְפָנַי הַיִּרְיָה,
 יָדַי מוֹנֵפּוֹת אֶל־עַל, אֲנִי
 נִכְנַעַת, אֲנִי לֹא כָּאֵן בְּכָל־
 רַק אֶל תִּגַּע בִּי לְרַעַה אֲדוֹן,
 אֲנִי חִפָּה מְרַע מְזֹדוֹן
 עוֹד לֹא הִסְפַּקְתִּי כְּלוּם בְּכָל־ל,
 תִּרְחַם תִּרְחַם.

Everywhere The Sheikh

Sated, drunk, and sleepy
I lie on pillows of fire,
on my right the sheikh, to my left the sheikh,
everywhere the sheikh.
An *abayah* is wrapped around his head
like a crown of ghosts, a *galabiya*
on his thin body, barefoot
he stands on all fours,
sobs like a blind beast.
Suddenly he sprouts a wagging tail,
his ears open to my sweet tune.
Afterwards he vanishes, a pale bubble,
like my drunkenness.

בכל מקום השיף

שְׁבֵעָה, שְׁתוּיָה וּמְנַמְנֶמֶת,
 רוֹבֶצֶת עַל כְּסָתוֹת שֶׁל אֵשׁ,
 מִיְמֵי הַיָּם, לְשִׁמְאֵלֵי הַיָּם,
 בְּכָל מְקוֹם הַיָּם.
 עֲבָאִיהָ מִתְעַקֶּלֶת עַל רֹאשׁוֹ
 כְּכֹתֵר רְפָאִים, גְּלִבְיָהּ
 לְגוֹפּוֹ הַדָּק, פָּרוֹם נְעֵלִים
 הוּא עוֹמֵד עַל אַרְבַּע,
 מִיַּבֵּב כְּחִיָּה עוֹרֶת.
 זָנַב מְכַשְׁפֵּשׁ צוֹמַח לוֹ פֶּתַע,
 אֲזָנָיו כְּרוּיּוֹת לְמִתְקֵי נְגוּנֵי.
 אַחַר הוּא מִתְנַדֵּף, בּוֹעָה חוֹרֶת,
 כְּשִׁכְרוֹנֵי.

She Grows Shorter

A dead butterfly got stuck in her hair, the metaphor
died with it. What else died that day?
Her feelings for him, which rotted:
the “bonfire of the vanities” no longer warms
the heart, her sheets seem dead too.
And in her way she grows shorter,
soon she’ll vanish.
The worry lines on her face deepen,
she pretends she’s not,
but she knows:
the tears now are only beginning
like the first rain of the season.

היא הולכת ומנמיכה

פֶּרֶפֶר מֵת הַסְתַּבֵּף בְּשַׁעֲרוֹתֶיהָ, הַמְטָפוֹרָה
 מְתָה עָמוּ. מָה עוֹד מֵת בְּאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם?
 רְגִשׁוֹתֶיהָ אֵלָיו, שְׁנַמְקוּ:
 "מְדוֹרֵת-הַהֶבְלִים" אֵינָה מְחַמֶּמֶת עוֹד
 אֶת הַלֵּב, לְסִדִּינֶיהָ פְּנֵי מֵת, גַּם כֵּן.
 הִיא הוֹלֶכֶת וּמְנַמֶּיכָה בְּדַרְכָּהּ,
 עוֹד מְעֵט תַּעֲלֵם.
 חֲרִיץ הַדָּאָגָה בְּפָנֶיהָ מְעַמֶּיק,
 מְעַמֶּידָה פְּנִים שֶׁהִיא לֹא,
 אֲבָל הִיא יוֹדַעַת:
 הַבְּכִי עָתָה רַק מִתְחִיל,
 כְּגֶשֶׁם רֵאשׁוֹן שֶׁיָּבֹוא.

THE ELEPHANT HUNTERS

Norman Lock

We were worn out with starting afresh each time, as was the place we started from. Always the same place, the same jumping-off point. The ground was beaten flat – the shambles and the many entrances to the interior. The seventh entrance led to the most profound wilderness. It was from the seventh entrance that we heard the rumor that De Groot, the elephant poacher, had been killed by the wild forest people.

“We should shut the door and lock it,” said Quigley. “White men have no business there.”

An emissary arrived with a request from the Minister of the Interior. The Ministry wanted De Groot – more precisely De Groot’s reputation – brought out.

He had gone to the Congo to get ivory. We had heard the agents up and down the railroad talk of it – its quantity, prodigious, and quality, the highest. They also whispered of “indiscretions.” The missionaries had sent a formal protest.

“He exceeded his authority,” the emissary said cautiously. “We wish to rehabilitate him – for the good of the nation and the trade.”

His reputation had recently jumped the ocean, thanks to an article in the Sunday supplement where the poacher had been represented in the most glowing terms as a benefactor of the native people.

“Five columns and a woodcut,” said the emissary, looking around for a place to sit. Finding none, he continued:

“Should the truth come to light, it will do us harm.”

De Groot was, in fact, a scoundrel. He had robbed the natives, paying them a penny’s-worth of worsted for ivory he sold for a fortune. He had not hesitated to mete out the most terrible punishments on those who were slow in putting ivory his way. His destruction of the elephants had been ruthless and extravagant.

“For piano keys!” thundered Quigley, who was the most morally advanced of our party. “For dominoes and pretty little inlaid boxes to keep a woman’s hairpins in!”

He was in favor of letting De Groot and his reputation rot.

Carlson and Blunt rallied. Both were preeminent elephant hunters. They respected De Groot as one of their fraternity and, whatever his outrages, were prepared to rescue his reputation from the darkness in which it had lately sunk.

“We must take care of our own,” they said.

The emissary handed us our commission in an envelope sealed in red wax which, in the heat of mid-day, was becoming a mere indistinguishable lump.

“We will make it worth your while,” he said.

Then he winked and was gone.

I do not countenance robbery and murder (though I admit their fascination); but my specialty is transport, and I was interested in how a reputation could best be transported. So I went with them, leaving Quigley to supervise the skimmers in their undressing of the bones.

*

As guides, we had two 'Ndorobo. To them the vast and intricate forest was an open book. Despite their wide experience, Carlson and Blunt could read only a little in it. To me it was illegible, like a half-erased inscription on an ancient stone.

We passed through shambas and by the doors of thatched huts, and then on to nameless regions – more categories than actual places on any map. There was no map, but the 'Ndorobo moved unerringly, stopping here and there to examine the dung.

We were hunting elephants!

“Why?” I asked.

“To find De Groot’s remains. His reputation will be with them.”

The topography changed. The trees were of a strange kind, and the only paths were those made by the elephants. I recalled an afternoon outside Utrecht. The fog had been so thick, so impervious that the house in which I was staying disappeared while I was out walking by the canal. I felt around inside it for a while, but in the end gave up my few things as lost.

Unseen by us, the forest people traveled the edges, calling to each other from time to time in savage syllables. The frightened porters fled, taking with them the empty vessel in which I had planned to send De Groot’s reputation back to the world to be cleaned and pressed and folded away in the national memory.

He must have been mad to come here! I thought. Mad to think he could penetrate this wilderness, drenched in savagery. Inevitably it had penetrated him, liable as he was to slip his moorings at the slightest prod of the invisible. His belief, like ours, was in phenomena: in sign posts – in elephants as elephants, not as the representation of titanic forces. But in the wilderness whose only signs are dung, we are soon lost.

As evening fell, we pitched camp at the bottom of a ravine and dined ravenously on bread and mutton. We slept badly. We woke and continued our cautious progress. Blunt and the 'Ndorobo consulted again and again, scanning every track with minute attention. At one point we tried to force our way through the thicket to get the wind more favorable, but in the end we returned to the paths the elephants had beaten.

I shivered with the excitement of stalking them.

“Don’t deceive yourself,” warned Carlson. “They are leading us.”

The 'Ndorobo vanished.

“They were unreal,” said Blunt, visibly shaken. “Figments of our imagination.” It was an admission of defeat.

In the clearing we found De Groot’s badly decomposed body. His reputation was equally unstable. Marie Curie might save it; I could not. All around us we heard the mournful trumpeting of the elephants and their heavy tread. The cries of the forest people indicated that they, too, were close by though we could not see them either. Our rifles were useless; they had become the white canes of the blind in our hands.

We carried a warrant of faith in the highly wrought manifestations of bureaucracy, its embossed and engraved documents – all mystery contained in an envelope closed with an official seal of red wax. But neither the elephants nor the wild forest people could be counted on to recognize them. De Groot had exceeded his authority, and they punished his presumption.

And would ours.

We entered the invisible. I had no hypothesis that would explain it.
The elephants trumpeted their joy.

SCORCHED-EARTH POLICY

V. Digitalis

I'd like to take this opportunity to register my extreme dissatisfaction with recent weather patterns inflicted upon us here in the Southeast. In fact, if you've been living anywhere on the Eastern Seaboard of these United States this past summer, you know there is one word to describe conditions in the local wide open spaces, and that word is Hell. Not the picturesque Hell of colorful roaring flames and a dressed-to-kill Mephistopheles, either, but a dull and crackling-dry wasteland rippling with hallucinatory heat waves, and sporting an array of flora so blighted and seared that the sensitive gardener will avert his or her eyes during each day's scramble between house and car. On the few recent occasions when I have surveyed my own garden at any length I have felt like Vlad the Impaler picnicking amidst a forest of severed heads.

There are a few consolations, of course. You don't see much of that vomitous-looking ground fungus that often ornaments bark mulch during less arid seasons, and for that I'm thankful. I always feel rather unwell myself when I see it and have sometimes leapt to hasty conclusions in which the dog figures prominently.

Let me note, too, that I have not seen a single Japanese beetle this summer. In more typical years the roses are swarming with them by mid-June, and cutting flowers for the house generally means transporting a hidden few indoors, where they will provide an unwelcome surprise to the innocent dinner-preparer by clambering indignantly out of the sink and onto a nearby countertop.

But why play the Glad Game? We're not Pollyannas here, but the opposite — gardeners. There's no point in tarting up disaster. If the roses are not crawling with beetles then they are becrisped by dessication, and who's to choose one over the other?

One of course sees certain plants touted as drought-resistant — echinacea, gaillardia, zinnias, and so on — but these claims are often disingenuous. In rainless times a coneflower might not simply vanish neatly from the face of the earth as would, say, a maidenhair fern, but still it can shrivel up shockingly and, at five to six feet tall, might as well be a billboard announcing the garden's current miseries. There are few sights more repellent than that of a so-called drought-resistant plant that has reneged on its agreement to be indestructible. Among other shortcomings, most of these hardies have a scratchy, slightly inorganic quality, as though they had been run up hastily out of toilet brushes: it's difficult not to feel that they have an obligation to withstand pretty much anything in order to compensate. If I hired a burly thug to act as bouncer at my saloon, I certainly wouldn't expect him to be running off to the emergency room at the first sign of a hangnail.

On the other hand, I have been surprised and impressed by the single-minded endurance of the annual vincas I stuck in as an afterthought among the perennials in my front garden. Their simpering, candy-coated quality is deceiving: they have clung to life and in fact have put on a good show of actually thriving during the many balmy, 100-degree interludes we've been treated to. I'd never have guessed vincas would harbor such reserves of toughness, flimsy-petaled as they are.

Also doing yeoman service are some clumps of indigo heliotrope I spread around fairly lavishly this spring. Their rugose leaves are a tad less handsome than usual owing to liberal applications of the solar branding iron, but they are good-looking all the same and very attractive to butterflies. Supposedly heliotrope is sometimes called “cherry-pie plant” because of its scent, and while I’m annoyed by the Little-House-on-the-Prairie-ishness of the term it’s also fairly accurate. A stronger wallop of the same odor is delivered by the potato vine, a succulent and leggy little weed that grows at a horrifying rate and blooms in clusters of dull and unimpressive white flowers. I spend a good deal of time pulling it out of all sorts of places, but occasionally it gets going in an obscure and innocuous spot and then I leave it there and enjoy its scent as it wafts inappropriately out of, for example, the rhododendrons on the dark side of the house.

Still, this is putting a Happy Face on a nuclear warhead. There is something intensely dispiriting about a wilted 40-foot tall tree, as I myself have discovered by looking out my front door and across the street at an overgrown copse of silver maples and choke cherries. When I see trees in this kind of distress I have no trouble at all imagining what they will look like lying spread-eagled across the remains of my car after next winter’s first severe ice storm.

It may be well to establish an emergency policy for pulling the garden through parched times like these, particularly since many localities may be imposing water restrictions. (Mine didn’t, although some of the surrounding counties did, and I felt very guilty about this even as I unleashed raging torrents on my rose beds.) Such a policy need not be elaborate, but merely predicated on logic. To wit:

1. Forget the lawn. If you are a man you will probably find this a particularly wrenching decision, but the grass will likely come back eventually and if not, sayonara to it. Grass seed will no doubt be available in mid-autumn.

2. You may fuss slightly with the annuals, but don’t make a federal case out of it. Water things in pots, which dry out very quickly, but don’t perform heroic measures on bedded cannon-fodder like impatiens and snapdragons. If the going gets tough, cut them loose and trust in Darwin.

3. If you have a lily pool, keep it topped up just enough to prevent the fish from floating off to the Sweet Hereafter and no more. The lowered water level may well expose things best left unseen, but unless these include portions of a human corpse, ignore them.

4. If you have a kitchen garden, you will find that some vegetables can make it on restricted water, but most can’t. Even hose dousing, if you’re on a heavily treated municipal system as I am, will just barely keep things hanging on by their fingertips, and you might as well forget about cucumbers, peas, lettuce, and anything else that is essentially crunchy water. Stunted vegetables in general are not taste treats. In many areas, you can write off the summer garden and plant for fall if the drought has eased by then: otherwise, there’s always next year.

5. Try to keep your perennials going if possible. Because most are relatively deep-rooted, they’re not automatically goners if the soil surface dries out slightly (though some, like Japanese iris, will be pretty displeased); on the other hand, it

usually takes several years for a given specimen to come into its full glory, so it's worthwhile to provide some form of life support in order avoid going back to Square One.

6. If you have only one drop of water to your name, siphon it off to a tree. As anyone with eyes in his head knows, trees and shrubs provide the architecture of a garden and should be kept alive at all costs. You might not think an established magnolia or dogwood would be seriously affected by a drought of one or two month's duration, but you would be wrong. And unfortunately, by the time said tree exhibits visible signs of water stress, it's often too late to save it: if it doesn't die outright, it's liable to be dispatched by an Arctic blast at some point during the coming winter. In these parts, rhododendrons, hollies, azaleas, and boxwoods are particularly vulnerable, and they're not cheap to replace. Watch them.

Needless to say, you would be far ahead of the game in all departments if you had the sense to provide a good mulch for everything early in the spring. If not — well, shame on you. You might as well pull down the shades, ensconce yourself in an easy chair, and settle in with your stamp collection or your knitting in bleak anticipation of the weeks and weeks of punishing monsoon rains that, even as I write this, must surely be lying in wait.

See also:

V. Digitalis, "In the Garden," *Archipelago* Vol. 1, Nos. 2, 3, 4; Vol. 2, No. 1

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First, artistic perception had to overcome itself to the point of realizing that even something horrible, something that seems no more than disgusting, is, and shares the truth of its being with everything else that exists. Just as the creative artist is not allowed to choose, neither is he permitted to turn his back on anything: a single refusal, and he is cast out of the state of grace and becomes sinful all the way through.

Rilke, LETTERS ON CÉZANNE, October 19, 1907
tr. Joel Agee

&&&&&

FOLLY, LOVE, ST. AUGUSTINE

1

Vocatus atque non vocatus deus aderit

By late August the sun had canted toward autumn, giving the first hint of decadence while summer was at its peak of ripeness. In that light of almost-melancholy anticipation, peaches were fat and juicy, the local melons heavy in weight and subtle in taste. In those days I read these books: Garry Wills' new short life of St. Augustine and Simone Weil's *WAITING FOR GOD*, with its tender preface by Leslie Fiedler. I encountered Simone Weil again, after a long separation. I could no longer imagine living in that flame of belief, her willingness to sacrifice the body for the love of God, which purified her mind, and so, her prose. She wrote: "I feel that it is necessary to me, prescribed for me, to be alone, an outsider and alienated from every human context whatsoever." About this Fiedler remarks, "To have become rooted in the context of a particular religion, Simone Weil felt, would on the one hand have exposed her to what she calls 'the patriotism of the Church,' with a consequent blindness to the faults of her own group and the virtues of others, and would, on the other hand, have separated her from the common condition here below, which finds us all 'outsiders, uprooted, in exile.' The most terrible of crimes is to collaborate in the uprooting of others in an already alienated world; but the greatest of virtues is to uproot oneself for the sake of one's neighbors and of God." (This, published in 1951, when memory of World War II was fresh, and alienation was an existential condition.)

I first read Simone Weil in my uncomprehending young-womanhood, living as a sort of beguine, with God and books, in the Alaskan bush. In truth, I lived with the absence of God, for in my youth I had once challenged Him (the God of my youth, who was the Father received from the ages) to reveal Himself to me. These were the terms of my challenge, which also was a bargain: God, I don't believe in You. I can't know You as I've been taught You Are. I want to find out if You Are for myself. But I promise this: if I am wrong, and if you are going to punish me, even so, I will always do my best. But if I'm not wrong, let me know. – I held my breath for some time afterwards.

Simone Weil (1909-1943) was the daughter and second child of bourgeois, assimilated-Jewish parents. Her elder brother, André, became the eminent mathematician; as a boy he directed her early reading in literature and science. She, also, was a brilliant student, obtaining her *baccalaureat ès lettres* with distinction at age 15. At the Collège Henri IV, she prepared for the competitive examination for the École Normal under Alain, eminent philosopher and essayist, who recognized her particular genius for philosophy. She became a qualified teacher and taught in provincial schools for several years, until she took a year's leave in order to "experience fully" the life of working people, whose hard existence she had observed from afar; and so she took a job – this is well-known – at the Renault factory and worked on the assembly line. "There I received forever the mark of a slave," she wrote: "Since then I have always regarded myself as a slave." Despite terrible migraines and delicate health, she resolved to live as her companion workers did, until she returned to teaching. This was in 1935; in 1936, she went to Barcelona, to see for herself the war between the Falange and the Republicans (of all stripes, but particularly the Communists). On the Catalan front Simone Weil experienced – there can be no doubt of this – the terror of war, and it marked her. But what takes my heart is that, outwardly, she was a rather clumsy young woman, determinedly unattractive in the conventional sense, with bobbed hair and utilitarian glasses, and was high-minded and not particularly sociable, so that she must have seemed foolish. Perhaps to the wise and the truly kind, she was a holy fool. But it is impossible to imagine her doing anything useful in the rough bivouac of the fighters she attached herself to; and, in fact, a dreadful accident occurred, when she tripped over a kettle of boiling oil and was badly burned. Fortunately, for medical care was poor, her always-mindful parents rescued her from the field hospital where she had been sent.

This catastrophe ended her direct political work, although she never repented of her youthful radicalism and belief in social action; but now her attention was being turned away, and toward God.

In 1938 I spent ten days at Solesmes, from Palm Sunday to Easter Tuesday, following all the liturgical services. I was suffering from splitting headaches; each sound hurt me like a blow; by an extreme effort of concentration I was able to rise above this wretched flesh, to leave it to suffer by itself, heaped up in a corner, and to find a pure and perfect joy in the unimaginable beauty of the chanting and the words. This experience enabled me by analogy to get a better understanding of the possibility of loving divine love in the midst of affliction. It goes without saying that in the course of these services the thought of the Passion of Christ entered into my being once and for all.

There was a young English Catholic there from whom I gained my first idea of the supernatural power of the sacraments because of the truly angelic radiance with which he seemed to be clothed after going to communion. Chance – for I always prefer saying chance rather than Providence – made of him a messenger to me. For he told me of the existence of those English poets of the seventeenth century who are named metaphysical. In reading them later on, I discovered the poem ... called "Love". I learned it by heart. Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I make myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting it as a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that, as I told you, Christ himself came down and took possession of me.

In my arguments about the insolubility of the problem of God I had never foreseen the possibility of that, of a real contact, person to person, here below, between a human being and God. In the *Fioretti* the accounts of apparitions rather put me off if anything, like the miracles in the Gospel. Moreover, in this sudden possession of me by Christ, neither my senses nor my imagination had any part; I only felt in the midst of my suffering the presence of a love, like that which one can read in the smile on a beloved face.

The short life of Simone Weil – the life as expressed in her writings – is worthy of the closest contemplation. Though hapless, she was resolute in her desire never to separate herself from her fellow human beings. After the Second World War began, she moved with her parents to America, but she could not accept her privileged position. She crossed to England, and there rationed her daily intake of food to match that of her countrymen under German rule. She starved slowly until her death in late August 1943.

Simone Weil believed, or knew, that God had not called her to baptism because He had imposed on her different vocation:

that I may serve God and the Christian faith in the realm of the intelligence. The degree of intellectual honesty that is obligatory for me, by reason of my particular vocation, demands that my thought should be indifferent to all ideas without exception, including for instance materialism and atheism; it must be equally welcoming and equally reserved with regard to every one of them. Water is indifferent in this way to the objects that fall into it. It does not weigh them; they weigh themselves, after a certain time of oscillation.

I know quite well that I am not really like this – it would be too beautiful; but I am under an obligation to be like this; and I could never be like this if I were in the Church.

That that poor body was inhabited by so fierce and incandescent a mind dissolves any feeling toward her that is less than veneration. But for the moment I would rather, simply, read George Herbert's poem.

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of lust and sinne.
 But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew near to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
 I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
 I cannot look on thee.
 Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
 And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
 My deare, then I will serve.
 You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.

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Reading Garry Wills' lively evocation – his Augustine breathes – I was struck again by the battle the young African scholar and orator had waged with himself between faith and the body. Put more brutally: Why, in the Christian Church, is the body extinguished for the love of God?

I would like to dwell for a little while on a seldom-remarked occurrence: that before his conversion, Augustine lived with a Catholic woman and had a son by her, and that he loved them both very much. Wills believes that Augustine's reputation as sexually promiscuous is a misjudgment; that, while he was as eager for sexual contact as any young man of his station would be, in fact he loved and was devoted to a woman of the town, with whom he lived for fifteen years. He did not, in his writings, give her name. Wills thinks they lived together with the full knowledge of his mother, the widowed Monnica. Gently, Wills names the woman Una, after Augustine's sentence: "I lived with only one woman [*unam habebam*] and kept faith with her bed."

In the year 384, when he was thirty, Augustine established a sizeable household – Una, their son, Monnica, retainers – in Milan, where, writes Wills, "Augustine moved onto a higher social plane." "A government career was beginning, with the prospect of marriage into wealth. Since marriage was primarily a property arrangement, and Monnica was still managing her dead husband's estate, she arranged the engagement to a Christian heiress not yet old enough to wed." The *dénouement* was swift: "What, then, of Una? She went back to Africa, vowed to live a life of consecrated continence." Augustine (while showing a "lack of enthusiasm" for his arranged marriage) wrote:

Since she was an obstacle to my marriage, the woman I lived with for so long was torn out of my side. My heart, to which she had been grafted, was lacerated, wounded, shedding blood.

For his own advantage, he agreed to part with her. It is still appalling. No matter that she was 'torn from his flesh'; ambition and his mother (it seems) were the instruments which removed her. Was Monnica an overbearing mother? Rebecca West thought so (Wills disagrees). Did Augustine marry? It seems not, although he did not remain celibate after Una's departure, but took a "stop-gap" mistress." Augustine at this time was a pagan and was a rising man at court. But at the same time, his teacher, Simplician, was guiding him, through intense questioning and tales of conversion, toward Christianity. And here also – I suppose this – came the intercession of Monnica: for I can imagine this woman's worldly ambition for her gifted son, but also, her Catholic, weighty, unyielding concern for his soul. I imagine she prayed for him ceaselessly.

"On the day of his conversion, he began the last great struggle against grace" by entering a garden with his friend. He endured an agony of will against body. The description of that event is worthy of being read at length; in brief: he *willed* to overcome his desire, but his body would not accept the order. His analysis of his own psychological drama is engrossing:

Even while thrashing about with stymied effort, my will still had effect on my body – unlike the situation of those who have the will but not the bodily effect (because, perhaps, a limb they want to move is amputated, tied down, withered by a malady, or

otherwise debilitated). No, when I tore my hair, pounded my head, laced fingers around my knee to hug it to me, I was accomplishing what the will told the body to do. The willing would not have been followed by this effect if my limbs were pinned down, since here the effecting was a different thing from the willing. Yet I could *not* do what I far more ardently wanted to do, and which I should have been able to do at will, since what I wanted was, precisely, to will. Here the motion to be dictated was in the will itself, and simply to will were to do. Yet I could not. My body's limbs were moved by the soul's lightest volition, yet the soul did not respond to its own ardent willing, though this was its *own* will.

As he is struggling with himself he sits down under a fig tree. At some moment he hears a child's voice. "Pick up and read," it commands. He turns back to the book he had been reading and sees the text: "Be clothed in Jesus Christ."

The very instance I finished that sentence, light was flooding my heart with assurance, and every shadow of doubt evanesced.

Thus he entered the Church. Wills proposes that Augustine's written examination of himself should be read in the light of his theology, which evolved in breadth and depth across his long life. With this in mind, he points to the first 'sin' about which Augustine examined himself, the theft of pears from an orchard with a gang of his friends. But why was this prank a sin, compared to the sin of the flesh? Augustine argued the case of his guilt from Genesis. He did not choose to do evil; rather, he drew an analogy to the moment when Adam accepted the apple from Eve and ate of it.

Adam did not want to disappoint her, when he thought she might be blighted without his comforting support, banished from his heart to die sundered from him. He was not overcome by disordered desire of the flesh, which he had not yet experienced as a thing in his body at odds with his mind, but by a kind of amicable desire for another's good, which often happens, making us sin against God so as not to turn a friend against us.

Inversely, Augustine concluded that mastering his sexual desire (the proximate cause of his struggle in the garden) was as overcoming his love of fellowship for the love of God, or renouncing the lower love – as was Adam's support of Eve's sin for the sake of love of her – for the higher. This is difficult for a woman to read, no matter how dispassionate she strives to be as a reader. Spiritual pride also is a form of ambition, she notes.

Yet, I cannot dismiss the effect of grace, which overmasters logic. At the same time, I know the love of the body and its glories, the ordinary flesh which brings us delirious joy.

And yet, I know that the glories and delights of the body unfocus the mind, and – perhaps – seduce one away from higher things. Desire is disquieting. What exaltation of the flesh allows for the voice of God? (It can allow, has allowed, for the voice of the gods. But...I am not a pagan.)

“*Bidden or not bidden, God is present.*”

Yet a tincture of bitterness had seeped into my consciousness, demanding to be recognized and examined. I had not achieved compassion; rather, a mixture of love, something (I feared) like pity, tenderness, and dismay remained. The attempt to have known a person beloved in himself, as a living creature – this is the position of disengagement and respect – and equally as the one who would offer the love, companionship, conversation so deeply desired, but, finally, denied me: this unreconciled dialectic was what I struggled with, a figure of sacred and profane love.

I had, by conscious choice, rooted myself in the body, choosing, so to speak, profane love. Stubbornly, I remained grounded, or tried to do so; yet, on the ground I had made a home the spirit of God was not imminent, or, I was not available to It, if It were here. But, long ago, I had lost the faculty of dispassion; I was not philosophical, but an investigator through the body. And the body, overwhelmed, had grown insensitive and bruised and wanted the cessation of pain.

Simone Weil wrote that suffering is a sign of God’s love. That is her beautiful use of paradox. But I did not believe this, or not for myself. I had no comprehension of such a God, nor the remotest sense of His love. Yet, in spite of the blows to the body and spirit of recent years – although I kept denying how bruising they had been; for, how could a person in my social and economic position claim to have suffered? my troubles were the ordinary difficulties of life – how nicely I had been kept in material comfort. As I had no feeling of deserving this, I could only consider it a situation in which I had been placed. And yet, I considered that placement to be part of the test, or a test, I had been given; and didn’t think I had done well at it. My sense of hope, or curiosity, my sheer delight in the varieties of life, were sorely tested by comfort. Their muscular strength was much weaker than I had thought.

Yet, if I believed I had been put to a test, what, then, did I believe had been the Examiner? And what had It been testing me for? For I found that I did believe that tests are given us, by some Entity that is larger than our (social) selves. That was as far as I could go. I couldn’t reconcile the great contradiction in which I *lived*, between the urgent, unmediated demands of the body, and the elegant delight of the works of mind (or, spirit, if I must).

For, my body had interrupted the course I had thought *I* followed, and was exigent. I was more than a little amazed to realize how deeply pain distracted me from what I had thought was the real work, the life of words.

Intimations of mortality: during August, in the month of sunlight and ripe peaches, I went weekly to the hospital to have blood drawn. The people I saw there were creatures of a graceless physical world, grotesque bodies without the signal of Mind that enlarges our poor human species. A sight haunted me: a thin old man in a wheel chair, pushed by his thin, resigned-looking wife. He wore a helmet and his head lolled on his thin chest. Suffering was in his face. I thought, *How could I endure such wretchedness?* I was vulnerable and helpless as I passed them, being myself wheeled in the other direction. St. Francis called his body Brother Mule. I was so sad to learn that my own ‘brother mule’ kicked harder than I could stand. It wanted a very great deal of attention. My will couldn’t ignore it. This body: it was the carrier of the Spirit, or the Mind, surely? Why was it so demanding, and what did it want now? What on earth did the body want?

My mother's death was terrible to see. She had long feared it. Her last weeks were a struggle, the body clinging to a diminished life while the mind raved. What test had been set, and by whom? Her Catholicism and her love of God were inflexible while her body was put through wretched contortions. I think her fierce will kept it alive until the final cost, and I think that will was animated by fear.

Was that a contrast to Simone Weil's life and death? My mother kept a spiritual diary, which I won't read, I think. She was not a philosopher, as Weil was, but she had some sort of direct access to certain saints, perhaps even to God; her God. The immensity of that, or its awfulness, dazzled me for many years; but I have tried to reject it and stay in this world. And I was appalled by what Weil called *le pesanteur*. Dead weight....

-KM

See also:

Reminiscence: Lee Goerner, *this issue*

On Memory, *Vol. 3, No. 2*

Passion, *Vol. 3, No. 1*

The Flea, *Vol. 2, No. 4*

On Love, *Vol. 2, No. 2*

Fantastic Design, With Nooses, *Vol. 2, No. 1*

Kundera's Music Teacher, *Vol. 1, No. 4*

BOOKMATES

B.Z. Niditch

A precocious adolescent, I began my library by putting *LITTLE MEN* near Oscar Wilde and *LITTLE WOMEN* beside Virginia Woolf. Little did I realize how I wanted compatibility on my bookshelf. But soon I had T.S. Eliot moving next to Henry James and gossiping at table; recluse Ivy Compton Burnett on grand speaking terms with the gregarious voice of Truman Capote. Next to him I placed *THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFÉ*, so if Truman became bored for a repast he could eat out of Carson McCuller's hands.

As I grew older and more mischievous, I put Norman Mailer and his hero, Ernest Hemingway, next to Djuna Barnes and Jane Bowles, respectively. I could hear the chatter and arguing: "Oh, do you wanna, Djuna?" "No, Norman; not now, not ever." "But it's so lonely — even here with Hemingway." "I think you need male companionship, Mailer. I don't need the heavies today. I'd prefer to be next to someone lighter." I had an idea. I decided in the interest of literary peace to move Ms. Barnes next to Edith Sitwell so she could put her cover up and hear the trickle of delightful verses.

A more compatible pair was Isaac Rosenberg and Paul Celan, who discussed the suffering of war, pain, and human holocaust. I hid behind their covers but I saw a tear or two appear unnoticed on the bookmarks. On their left were Walter Benjamin and Yannis Ritsos and on their right, Roy Campbell and Yukio Mishima.

I put all the Russian novelists and poets together, though the nineteenth-century writers could not believe what their twentieth-century partners had to endure, as if progress and humanity would necessarily follow the age. Only Dostoevsky felt justified in his own future revelations, and I put him by his melancholy American counterpart, Nathaniel West. Next to the Russians I placed the Poles, then the Germans, so they would all see how nationalism was a greater force than religion and any class they once had.

The People of the Book I cast to one side, beginning with the Biblical prophets, following with their psychology, politics and history of long suffering; but I felt badly they would have to mourn alone. I had to leave Kafka at a safe distance from Primo Levi so he might be spared the elements of the horror of what was to happen.

Then I kept the Roths together — Joseph, Philip and Lillian — and Lillian Hellman next to *THE INFERNO* and *THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO*. Arthur and Henry Miller were side by side for contrast. Proust has his own corked bookstall entirely to himself. Something had to be done with Céline and Gênet. Sentenced to the flesh, they would collaborate with the enemy, given the chance.

I decided to have Jane Austen sit next to George Eliot because I loved them so much and overheard them discussing their craft. "I often write when company is around. It doesn't bother me, the chatter and all. I love a narrative without people, children's games without children, music without musicians. I just hear my characters, anyway." "Jane, I've tried my best that way with a cup of tea. Isn't it delightful to know that obscure as we are now, someday we will be the talk around academic seminars?"

Thomas Hardy liked that so much, I gave him a place nearby and then I put Emily Dickinson, for the time being, beside George, and I heard them discussing whether members of the clergy or the religious in particular made good partners. I had a special dispensation shelf for the religious poets and theologians. Yet I myself refused to be a theocrat and I put Martin Buber next to Bonhoeffer and the latter next to Martin Heidegger, but it created too much of a controversy. The noise was so deafening I had to shelve Heidegger next to Hannah Arendt to make her happy for once in her life.

I was becoming philosophical and novel myself so I decided to put Nietzsche's ECCE HOMO near Ralph Ellison's INVISIBLE MAN, beside Musil's THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES. And, on the first shelf was Chaim Potok's IN THE BEGINNING and on the last was Somerset Maugham's THE SUMMING-UP. Which I do now.

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An excerpt from the New York Times of July 24, 1965:

SPEAKING OF BOOKS

By Randall Jarrell

.....
I regularly recommend Saltykov-Shchedrin's THE GOLOVLYOV FAMILY; it makes me feel like Chaliapin just to say it. And recommending Kant's THE CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT, reader, is its own reward. A fresh, candid tone is best. Strauss told conductors to play "Elektra" as if it were "A Midsummer Night's Dream" — like fairy music"; that is how I recommend THE CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT.

May I finish by recommending — in no tone — some books for summer reading? Giraudoux' ELECTRA; Bemelman's HOTEL SPLENDIDE; KIM, Saint-Simon's MEMOIRS; Elizabeth Bishop's NORTH AND SOUTH; the new edition of A.L. Kroeber's textbook of anthropology, and Ralph Linton's THE STUDY OF MAN; Turgenev's A SPORTSMAN'S SKETCHES; Colette's JULIE DE CARNEILHAN and THE LAST OF CHÉRI; Pirandello's "Henry IV"; Freud's COLLECTED PAPERS; Peter Taylor's THE WIDOWS OF THORNTON; Isak Dinesen's OUT OF AFRICA; Goethe's aphorisms; Blake's "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"; Gerard Manley Hopkins' LETTERS TO ROBERT BRIDGES; Rilke's THE NOTEBOOKS OF MALTE LAURIDS BRIGGE, and Chekhov's plays, stories, letters — anything.

Poet, critic and novelist, Mr. Jarrell most recently published "Pictures From an Institution."

A collection of Randall Jarrell's prose was published this summer as NO OTHER BOOK Selected Essays edited and with an introduction by Brad Leithauser (New York: Michael di Capua Books/ HarperCollins, 1999).

Interesting Sites and Resources

Marvels

CHANDRA <<http://xrtpub.harvard.edu/index.html>> is the X-ray telescope sent recently by NASA into deep Space. It sends back astounding images, which can be seen on and downloaded from this site. For instance, EO102-72 is a “supernova remnant in the Small Magellanic Cloud, a satellite galaxy of the Milky Way. This galaxy is 190,000 light years from Earth. E0102 -72, which is approximately a thousand years old, is believed to have resulted from the explosion of a massive star. Stretching across forty light years of space, the multi-million degree source resembles a flaming cosmic wheel.” In this *Archipelago*, see two of these images.

Independent Presses

Back in Print <<http://www.backinprint.com>> A brilliant idea: through the agency of the Authors Guild, books gone out of print are made available to readers by way of print-on-demand, with book orders filled on-line, by toll-free phone, or through Shakespeare & Co., NYC. In this set-up, authors establish the price; titles available are varied and often surprising.

Catbird Press <www.catbirdpress.com> publishes, among other notable books, a number by Czech writers in translation, including THE POEMS OF JAROSLAV SEIFERT; a garland of these poems appeared in *Archipelago* Vol. 2, No. 3. DAYLIGHT IN NIGHTCLUB INFERNO offers Czech fiction from the “post-Kundera generation,” including work by Daniela Fischerová. Her “A Letter to President Eisenhower,” appears in Vol. 3, No. 1, from FINGERS POINTING SOMEWHERE ELSE, just published. Robert Wechsler, publisher of Catbird, has written an interesting book-length essay, WITHOUT A STAGE; THE ART OF LITERARY TRANSLATION; worth reading.

The Lilliput Press <<http://indigo.ie/~lilliput>> is an Irish publisher founded in 1984 by Antony Farrell. Some 150 titles have appeared under its imprint: art and architecture, autobiography and memoir, biography and history, ecology and environmentalism, essays and literary criticism, philosophy, current affairs and popular culture, fiction, drama and poetry – all broadly focused on Irish themes. Since 1985 they have brought out four volumes of the essays of the late Hubert Butler. Hubert Butler’s “The Artukovitch File” appears, with their permission, in *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 2.

McPherson & Co <www.mcphersonco.com> publishes such writers as the fascinating Mary Butts (THE TAVERNER NOVELS), Anna Maria Ortese (A MUSIC BEHIND THE WALL, Selected Stories Vol. 2), and the performance artist Carolee Schneeman. A beautiful story by Ortese, “The Great Street,” appeared in our inaugural issue, and the writer’s testament, “Where Time Is Another,” appeared in Vol. 2 No. 4.

Online Originals <www.onlineoriginals.com> is an internet publisher of literature who take the position, one we find ourselves much in agreement with, that “Conventional book publishing has changed dramatically in recent years. Most of the world’s publishers are now owned by a handful of media conglomerates, ruled in turn by their finance and marketing departments. To guarantee high profits, they tend to accept manuscripts only by only celebrity writers whose output conforms to the conventional mainstream market. ... We believe that the Internet is the way forward for all kinds of publishing. But for the benefit of our authors, we do not prevent them also publishing printed versions of their works at a later date.” They deliver “book-like” texts by e-mail.

Station Hill Press <www.stationhill.org> is a non-profit publisher run by the poet George Quasha. They publish writers of serious and surrealist bent, as well as very fine poetry and fiction. Among their writers are Maurice Blanchot and Spencer Holst (whose “The Zebra Storyteller” appeared in Vol. 3, No. 1). Maria Negroni, whose work appeared in Vol. 1, No. 1 and Vol. 2, No. 4, is the author of a beautiful work in poetry and prose, ISLANDIA, which they will publish this year, using print-on-demand; a noteworthy work of literature brought out by an interesting development in publishing technology.

Salmon Poetry <<http://www.salmonpoetry.com>> lives in County Clare, Ireland. The editor, Jessie Lendennie, is pleased to publish not only her countrymen, including, she tells us, the largest list of women poets of any Irish publisher, but also Alaskan poets, among whom are several old friends of ours. She wrote to say she liked our “The Repetition of Their Days,” Vol. 2, No.3.

Sun & Moon Press <www.sunmoon.com> is a fine, serious, literary press with a long backlist. They publish classics as well as contemporary fiction and poetry; writers and poets such as Arkadii Dragomoschenko (astonishing Russian poet), Paul Celan, Harry Matthews, Djuna Barnes, Paul Auster, Russell Banks. They will publish Maria Negroni’s LA JAULA BAJO EL TRAPO/CAGE UNDER COVER, tr. Anne Twitty, in a Spanish-English edition; a selection appeared in Archipelago, Vol. 2, No. 4.

Turtle Point Press <http://www.turtlepoint.com>> This intelligent press, led by Jonathon Rabinowitz, Helen Marx, and Jeanette Watson, is reviving several books by the marvelous Iris Origo, including her LEOPARDI: A STUDY IN SOLITUDE. Another necessary book published here is Hannah Green’s profound THE DEAD OF THE HOUSE. Jeanette Watson’s Books & Co. News is posted, as well. (An excerpt from Lynne Tillman’s BOOKSTORE, about Watson and Books & Co., once one of the cultural resources of Manhattan, appears in this issue.)

Fine Arts

iola <<http://www.artnetweb.com/iola/home.html>>. This perfectly eccentric site is like the dinner party of artists, thinkers, above all, talkers you want regularly to be invited to. Its host-redactor is Robbin Murphy, who is worth looking up. Of particular delight: The Little Window.

Kamera – <<http://www.kamera.co.uk>> came to us via the *Richmond Review* and is its pictorial mirror-image. Lively, hip, devoted to the photographic arts, pictures both still and moving, with features and reviews of movies and exhibits currently on in Britain.

Octavo <www.octavo.com> is a digital publisher committed to conserving books, manuscripts, and antiquarian printed materials via digital tools and formats. They make original works available to readers and book lovers through partnerships with libraries, individuals and institutions. As a sample, they offer a PDF download of William Shakespeare Poems. We are always pleased when web publishers use PDF files, as we do for our Download edition.

The Private Library <<http://connoisseurweb.com/services/index.html>> A lovely surprise hidden behind a wall of *chinoiserie*. “Providing Services to Bibliophiles Since 1980,” Kurt Thometz offers guidance on the development of collections, cataloging, organizing library software, conservation, and appraisals. “The Well Dressed Bibliophile” collects marvelous interviews with, portraits of Albert Murray, John Waters, Diana Vreeland, Fran Liebowitz, among others.

Work in Regress <<http://members.aol.com/perkons23>> This vertiginous site is by Peteris Cedrins, author of *The Pentralium*, an excerpt of which appears in this issue. Here also are two images of dark, thrilling paintings by Inguna Liepa; descent into the psyche.

Literary Reviews

The Barcelona Review <<http://www.barcelonareview.com>>, Jill Adams, Editor. A fine, multi-lingual (English, Castilian, Catalan) offering published in Catalonia by a multi-national group. Intelligent editing; interesting reading of younger writers from Europe and America.

Big Bridge <www.bigbridge.org> Edited by Michael Rothenberg, editor of OVERTIME, selected poems of Philip Whalen (Penguin, 1999), and Wanda Phipps, who bring an open-armed, ‘60s generosity to this “webzine.” “We think walls are good for keeping out the cold and rain,” they write: “They’re useless in the creation and propagation of art.” Big Bridge Press publishes chapbooks and handsome botannica.

The Cortland Review <<http://www.cortlandreview.com>> Established in 1997, this publication offers such poets as Charles Simic, Robert Pinsky, Henry Taylor, Mark Doty, Robert Creeley, Mark Jarman, Lloyd

Schwartz, Neal Bowers, R.T. Smith, John Kinsella. All poetry and most fiction appear in Real Audio format. They publish in February, May, August, and November, with Monthly features.

George Meyers Jr.'s LitKit <<http://www.georgejr.com>> bills itself as a “non-commercial zine and archive” and “a larkabout for readers with brains, and for writers with lightbulbs blazing in their heads.” That’s close enough; it’s an experience.

Jacket <<http://www.jacket.zip.com.au>> was founded and is edited by John Tranter, a Australian poet whose work is published often in the *TLS*. “For more than thirty years he has been at the forefront of the new poetry, questioning and extending its procedures.” In this quarterly literary journal he publishes the work of other writers generously. A new collection of his that should be read, *LATE NIGHT RADIO*, is published by Polygon & Edinburgh University Press. It can be ordered there (tel. 0131 650 8436), or through Columbia University Press <<http://www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/cup>>.

London Review of Books <<http://www.lrb.co.uk>> One of the few reviews we read cover to cover; published on paper every two weeks and worth subscribing to. The on-line edition offers a generous selection, including a recent review by Iain Sinclair of James Sallis <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n06/sinc2106.htm>>, a writer we’ve admired for some years. Among Sallis’ talents are a series of superb novels passing as detective stories: *THE LONG-LEGGED FLY*, *BLACK HORNET*, *MOTH*, *EYE OF THE CRICKET*. He also translated Raymond Queneau’s *ST. GLINGLIN*.

The Richmond Review <www.demon.co.uk/review> received approving notice (along with *Archipelago*) in the *TLS*. Its staff is drawn from about twenty-five young persons-about-London-publishing. The founding editor, Steven Kelly, is the author of *THE WAR ARTIST*, a chilling moral thriller about a man called Charles Monk, an artist who “only during wartime feels truly alive.” It was just published in the U.K. by Simon & Schuster.

Renditions <<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/renditions>> A magazine of translation, from the University of Hong Kong, Centre for Translation <<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/rct>>, edited by Eva Hung, whose poems appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol 3, No. 2.