

# ASHE!

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

Incarnation 9.1



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# ASHÉ

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## L'shana Tova, 5766

Stefanie Maclin

---

Walking through the Commons—  
State House to Park Street T—I argue  
With a Catholic  
Over religion.

He blames atheism,  
For communism, and WW2,  
For Nazism, for man thinking  
They have the right  
To take a life.

He offers to show me  
Where it is written  
In the bible, tell him  
I already know it,  
thankyouverymuch.

Tell him I memorized it,  
In Hebrew, and that god  
Is merely one more  
Shade of grey.

Tells me Judaism died

When Jesus crucified.  
Tells me it's not too late,  
That I too can be saved.  
Tells me the bible is.

I tell him my rabbi  
Discussed 'intelligent design'  
And evolution on the second day,  
That if he can accept both, so can  
Anybody.

Tells me evolution is a lie,  
That genetic research is a lie, that  
Everything I learned *is a lie*,  
That man didn't descend from apes, and  
That Creationism is.

That odd little half-smile broadens  
Across my lips, and I tell him,  
I'll take the dinosaurs any day.

---

## Alevai

Stefanie Maclin

---

I hold too much faith, in the ways  
I see the world. I match my colors  
to the mood of the sky. It's not my  
perception that is off, and it's not that I am  
slow. Just my memory goes a bit fuzzy when I  
don't sleep, but it's that:  
I've come a long way, in growing up,  
growing in, and into. Not to say,  
I don't still have a long way to go,  
but darling.

*(We all do, as such ways.)*

---

## Rosh Hashana, 5770

Stefanie Maclin

---

The shul is empty, whole rows of chairs vanished  
into years past, people gone with nary a passing  
or good-bye. But—  
it is the disappearance of the children,  
young voices carrying tunes and notes,  
quick feet in the aisles and seats,  
it is their loss we feel the most,  
because—  
this congregation is dying, this shul  
spiraling downward, this building in disarray.

We (can) do only as we have done:  
pray.

---

# Devi

Jed Bickman

---

## LATE AUGUST

I feel brought to Calcutta. Called to go alone, just at the moment I think I am fed up with standing alone. To what end?

When I meet my teacher for the first time, he has one theory to explain my presence: “Calcutta is the only city in the world that primarily worships the Goddess. Perhaps you came here to learn something from Her.” When I ask him what that might be, he says that he’s not my teacher, I am.

So, I turn to myself. I rule out the obvious immediately: I’m not going to meet a woman here. If I came here to learn from Her, I will not learn from a particular her in a specific body. I simply will not be with a physical woman until this chapter is complete. A period of celibacy is not something I would ask for, but is inexorably part of my path here. I knew this at the beginning, and there are plenty of reasons for it:

- Social repression, of countless manifestations, unique to this land, that I can and will not participate in
- In private company, I will refuse to echo the filth that she must constantly defend herself against on the street.
- Most likely, she will grow up in the dark kitchen of father’s house, then be transferred to the dark kitchen of her husband’s house.
- I defeat myself with desire, constantly.



This is the situation I placed myself in, and there's nothing to generalize from it.

Although my teacher is talking about the goddess in the most general and symbolic sense (we're both, at some unmentionable level, rational atheists), he's also talking about Maha Kali. Kali goes by all other names—not only the names of other goddesses (Durga, Madonna, La Virgin de Guadalupe, Sara Swati, the feminine principle,), but also any other name of a woman, you'll know her when you see her, and if you *are* her, you may already know it.

But for my story, Kali name means *time*, because she will stop for no man or women. No one escapes her destruction. Her name also means black, *Kalo* in Bengali, and she is as pure black as that word can signify. Blacker than Plato's cave, for example. In both Hindi and Bengali, *Kal* is the word for both "Yesterday" and "Tomorrow." Surprisingly, I find that this doesn't really confuse conversations.

I have at least ten months of tomorrows (that become yesterdays) in this land, in which tell this story of myself, ten months to destroy myself.

Now, I am at the beginning, a time of uncontrollable desire and expectation. I understand, I think, the importance of controlling it, for my happiness. Is happiness my desire?

*At a time near the beginning of this universe, there was a demon who terrorized the towns and hamlets of the countryside. His name was Raktabija (Blood Seed).*

*Every time a drop of Raktabija's blood fell to the ground, a thousand more identical bodies grew. When the humans sent out their armies to try to fight it, they only managed to wound him enough to build him an army that far outnumbered their own population.*

SEPTEMBER

Now it is *Durga Puja*, an outpouring in honor of the goddess Durga, who takes the form of Kali at will. An outpouring of bodies—tidal crowds that came to marvel at the biggest and gaudiest *pandals*—temporary temples, erected throughout the city in the middle of every street, bringing the city to a chaotic standstill weeks before the festival. For six days, Durga visits Bengal to be worshipped in the form of thousands of lavish clay idols, which are not representations of her, but rather embodiments of her. At the end of six days, they load each of her on her own truck, pile in behind her with firecrackers and noisemakers, and drive her across the city to throw her in the Hooghly river. Most of them wash out to sea, but the big ones sit along the riverside, bedraggled, godlike.

Meanwhile, Vodaphone, Inc., decides that I am not worthy of their cell phone services, as a suspect foreigner, and their offices will remain firmly shut through the festival. Internet is limited to what I can con out of Café Coffee Day, Inc., where I have a good cry—simple, familiar loneliness; I am again a stranger.

I pull myself together to submit myself to oceans of joyfully physical Bengalis. I meet Durga, again and again, in a castle, a chariot, a zoo of plaster animals, a geographically accurate globe, and a lot of pure mass and grandeur. She is always riding on the back of a lion, always slaying a mustachioed demon, always accompanied by Saraswati, goddess of creativity and water, and Ganesha, with whom you must be familiar.

After the festival ends, I move into an apartment, where I can make myself dinner and begin to build peace.

*The townspeople had no choice but to turn to Divinity for help. They approached Shiva, but he was deep in meditation. So they find Durga, Shiva's wife (in this story).*



*and the stake nothing less than the end of Time itself.*

*She opened her mouth. And when she opened her mouth, her tongue came out. Her tongue rolled out to blanket the entire battlefield, there was no more ground, only thirsty red tongue to stand on. So Raktabija stood on it, and they fought.*

## FEBRUARY

Would that I could declare my hollow heart a saint! Would that I could use my own fuel for myself, for creation rather than endless thrusting across the city, meaningless visual penetrations. Rather, in renunciation could come the silence of energy flowing upwards; rather, that I could reclaim myself instead of projecting outwards, constantly outwards.

*As Kali fought the demon with all her inescapable, everywhere-facing wrath, his blood spilled upon her tongue. She drank it in big, ecstatic swallows, draining his malevolent essence, shrinking his body down to nothing. He didn't stand a chance.*

## LATER FEBRUARY

On this side of the world, romantic love was invented behind a veil. By Sufi mystics. (Only later, Hindusthan would contribute, through the invention of Bollywood). In front of the veil, the face and body are left unloved, the essence loved.

Must love be embodied to be present? It can certainly be absent, I can feel her Lack, but must I? I begin to suspect the presence of a femininity that never left me, an aspect of the human where it meets essence in a place of my

own construction, perhaps within my own body, the beginning of a love that is comfortable in eternity, an ideal capable of transcending and transmuting the bodies I may or may not be lucky enough to sleep with in the future.

I treasure her exquisite absence, the emptiness wrought by a wandering life, to treasure solitude, knowing its impermanence. I will allow myself to live in front of the veil, knowing how thin it is.

*The demon was defeated and consumed. All demons are eventually defeated, or else they would be gods.*

### MARCH

The central question is this: Can the energy unexpended on unfulfilled desire be used? Have I been given celibacy as a gift or as a failure?

As I escape Calcutta into the vastness of the Indian railways and busways, I give myself the chance to find out. I experiment on my body.

I am a guest everywhere. A guest can do nothing but be humble, receive what is offered, the knowledge and foods that a place can offer. A guest should never stain his host's sheets. Suddenly, time feels short and my journey becomes a whirlwind.

As I walk, only the past walks with me. Wherever I go, people precede me—their lives precede me. I must only walk alone into foreign lives, without understanding. I must not be other than I. I can only be I, singular and alone, as my path overlaps with multitudes, but not precious individuals to call my own.

*Kali was left alone on the battlefield, still raging, drunk on blood. The townspeople stared at her in silent fear. And when she looked at them, she saw more demons everywhere.*

LATER, MARCH

I feel the scorching energy of unexpended desire boiling upwards. With concentration, and careful small batches of *kriya* yoga, I realize I can bring that fire upwards along my spine. It is undeniable, physical, human. It is also raw power, napalm, brilliance. It must not be unique to my body. I begin to look for accounts of it among the yogic traditions, because they are close at hand. I think I find it hidden between words of the few yogis and tantrics that share their teachings with me, in widely-beloved books and conversations I have had in Varanasi, Haridwar, Orissa, Pune, Sikkim and Shillong, each differently expressed in unsatisfactory language. Unfortunate reader, you will only have my inadequate midnight ravings:

I will not refuse my internal organs! I will not find consciousness only in my own skull! I will feel the liquid turning from water into blood. I will recombine myself to flow upwards once again, I will deny the downward flow of my *prana* (Life-giving substance: food, water, air, converted biologically into an essence) upwards into the wall behind my forehead. I can feel it gather beneath the bone, be it fluid or light I do not know. I can pool it between the hemispheres of my brain, in the cleft I can make a river flow, and can dive into that river, into the featherweight blackness, but it contains only more of itself. One day, I will drown in that river, that begins in my quivering and unsteady sexspasms, that flows through my confused stomach, through an arrhythmic heart attached to lungs that do not know when to exhale, through a voice-box that longs to be bigger than itself, to have its words be heard, through all the software in the back of my brain, where the river forks, each flowing over the peak of a wrinkled hemisphere, and where they meet in the middle of my forehead, where the fluid seethes but finally cools and becomes a reservoir, longing to escape the prison of my skin and rejoin all the fire of the world outside me, to cease desire and become its object.

What I can do with this is the mystery. Should I focus it on a false god? Or should I focus it on my own self, to build a consciousness without allegiance—without allegiance to any exteriority, any holiness, any image,

any structure?

*She began to kill all the demons she saw living quietly among the townspeople. She lopped off their heads in great batches, like grapes off a stem. It pleased her so much that she began to make a necklace out of their mustachioed heads.*

#### APRIL

Vibrating all night instead of sleeping, in the sandy wilderness near Konarak, Orissa, I learn to open the hole in my forehead. It can guide my nervous energy upwards along the strings of my twitching body, which is not yet a corpse.

If I continue down this path, what will I awaken? Will I lose capacity for specific love? Will I gain capacity for expansive consciousness? Would that be worth it? What do I propose to sacrifice?

*Time has mercy for no one. When her garland is full of bleeding heads, she begins to make a belt. She rampages through villages, leaving them burning in her tracks.*

#### APRIL

Chest pain in the night on the train,

A hot dry rush from the beach to Bhubaneswar to Hyderabad, I forgot to eat, I think.

If my body fails me now, I am alone.

Is my strength really what will run out first?

Something has to give out first, but I've always had such pride in

strength.

My heart is weak. It races at night when it should be at peace. It races at night in strange beds, making my whole chest hurt, as if it wants to collapse inward on itself. No breath can slow it down.

And if it fails me now, I am alone in the night. For the first time, I truly lust for safety. For the simplicity of not always holding my own life in my own hands.

*The townspeople are in more danger than the demon ever posed; Kali's rage threatens the fabric of existence itself. They run to divinity for help, awaken Shiva out of his meditation (a dangerous proposition). They tell him what his wife is up to. He doesn't think he can stop her; she's not in the habit of obeying him. Grumbling, he stands up and enters Existence.*

### LATE MAY

Long journeys later, I find myself with a free day in Guwahati, capital of Assam—a city that obviously doesn't want me within her (travel should be hard, but need not be *this* hard; another story for another telling). I will go to Khamakhya temple, where tantric devotees have worshipped and sacrificed to Kali throughout human history.

I find the end of the line to go inside the main sanctuary; the line is a long cage that snakes around the temple grounds. Once I submit myself to it, I am behind bars for at least two hours, and there is no giving up. The devout in line—mostly women, mothers with their daughters—stare at me relentlessly, as they should. The tourists who make it here usually don't care about getting *darsan*, and if they do, they should allow a temple priest to push them ahead of the line for a large 'donation.' I'm relieved that no such priest presents himself. Their gazes make me crystallize for myself why I am



doing this. I have something to ask, and to answer, for myself, and I need to go through the proper channels. I need this so I can go out into the world and seek love with an open heart. I have been to her temples before, felt her gaze upon me, and asked for nothing. I believe in asking for nothing. But this time, I am a supplicant.

A black goat is walked into the sacrifice pit, lined with linoleum tile. Without ceremony or warning, his head is lopped off with the kind of machete coconut sellers use. The gesture seems pointless, empty—Her thirst cannot be satiated so easily, and there will be another goat, soon. I will offer her this fire I have cultivated in my body. So I again enter myself, standing, waiting. I close my eyes. Plant my feet firmly and equally upon the reliable ground. This line will not move for minutes, at least. Breathe. I know now that I can control it in my body, to bring it upwards to offer to her. I begin to gather it in front of my tailbone. Breathe. Allow it to enter the bone of my spine. Breathe. Gather it upwards. Open my eyes—the line is suddenly moving forward, a crowd pushes anxiously at my back. Stop. Plant. Darkness. Breathe. In my chest, stomach, my throat. Stop, light, movement, forward. As we get closer to the temple, bodies press against me, eager to shove their way through the experience. Stand, silence. I almost fall against the body in front of me.

Behind me is a beautiful young girl—beautiful by definition rather than her specificity (I never look directly at her, she is not a place for my eyes to rest). After hours under the sun, collecting myself, we go through the broken metal detector into the sticky interior. The crowd begins to push, consolidate themselves into a small, holy space not built for crowds of bodies. She wedges her body against mine, gathering the full force of the crowd pushing behind us in her small frame. The line snakes incomprehensibly through the tiny outer vestibule. There is simply not enough air for the hundreds of heaving people here. The air we do have is heavy, chewable. I touch the ancient rock. Women are carved into the rock: serpent-women, big bosomed dancers in yogic positions, queens, servants. I touch the spherical chest of a temple dancer on a column, purportedly to stabilize myself. The stone is warm,

moist, breathes the stone air. My blood flows to my back, where she pushes me forward relentlessly. I briefly consider marrying her. I retain my fire in my forehead, coax it upward along my spine as it surges from my loins. We pass a new-looking fresco of Krishna flirting with his five thousand wives. She pushes me forward. When we stop, she leans familiarly on my shoulder. This could only happen here, in this temple, now, in heat, in a holy space where social boundaries mean nothing, and I think I'm expected to accept silently after so long, so I do. But for me, her touch is laden with significance she did not create. I have not seen her face, and I don't want to. We go past a heaving idol cloaked in propitiating flowers, and are descending the stairs into the subterranean inner chamber.

The air takes on a physical shape, cooler, full, charged. As we stop on the stairs, I close my eyes, and she is here, Kali, towering above me. She is in this room; she is everywhere, I cannot see her face but my face is only meters away from her crotch. I feel her tremendous legs planted over her sanctuary. I have fallen into a trance. The girl behind me pushes me so savagely I almost fall down the stairs, and I decide not to marry her.

My moment comes in front of the shrine; the priest sees me, knows how to direct me through my encounter with Divinity: look! You see? Have you seen the eyes? (The idea is *darsan*, where the goddess glimpses her worshipper, and her worshipper glimpses her; it's all about eye contact) Now touch this water--touch the water! Now go. I have taken a handful of holy water, and as I turn away, I rub it on my forehead. As I feel it evaporating, a moment of reprieve from the heat and discomfort, and I know her answer.

I asked Maha Kali to marry me, and she said yes.

*Shiva lies supine in the path of Kali's destruction and waits for her. His body is a trap.*

*As she comes raging forth, she doesn't see her husband on the ground, and she steps on him. A wife stepping on her husband*

*is an unthinkable violation of his position, and her shock at the disrespect that he has tricked her into stops her wrath cold.*

\*\*\*

She will take human form, and I will give myself to her, entirely. At some time, *when* being irrelevant to both of us. It is enough to know that one day I will see her manifest in a person that I can love, that I can give myself to. I may have to wait many lifetimes. But my thirst will, one day, be quenched. I'm not waiting for her; I'm living free, living my dream. In the mean time, I can find the power that thirst itself gives me, I can transmute prosaic lust to a generalized love for self that I hope to transmit to anyone who is brought into my life by the injunction of karma. I need not be alone, I need not be with another, I need not be so laden with meaning, I need not be devoid of meaning. I must be subject to the functioning of karma and the disjunctions of geography. My path lies open and unwritten before me.

*And freeze-frame. This is her moment; when she is pictured, she is always pictured right now, standing on her husband, garlanded with severed heads. Men like to say that it is a moment of her shame. But she doesn't look ashamed--she looks proud, foot planted on Shiva's chest like she has conquered him, her tongue dripping out of her mouth down to her chest. He, all-powerful, has given himself to her. And this moment is Kali's unchanging immortality.*

---

# How To Get To Heaven, according to Google map

Lee M. Sloca

---

*a rerouting of Bill Hickok's, a lament for Maya*

take the I-10 E  
to CA-101 N  
toward Hollywood  
seek exit 4A Echo Park  
sigh right  
straight into Sunset  
then another right  
along a mile of city lives  
near Elysian Park  
at Quintero St. turn left  
it's the 1st dreamboat on the right  
with the pinkest of shutters and forever blue irises  
fasten your heartbeat  
double your wingspan  
*She too is writing about you.*

---

## Whenever She Dresses All Blues I Become Two

Lee M. Sloca

---

Once near Venice beach, I whispered,

*.. time . .... you ..*

*like ..... water*

*..... touch .....*

*.. ... soul*

Like the time, when she clenched her fist  
to strike at the injustices to hotel workers,  
I couldn't help but pounce on  
my own growling heart.

Like the time, when she peeled  
another onion layer off,  
revealing her white, trashed childhood,  
I couldn't help but dust off  
my own yellow soil.

Like the time, when she danced  
like a wildfire child,  
in naked happiness,  
I couldn't help but strip bare  
my own emptied bed.

So I whispered louder,

*The time I spent with you is  
like reaching out to a pool of water.  
Whenever I touch it, I am touching  
my own soul.*

Maya's blue eyes washed with the waves,  
"I have to think of something to answer that."

So I wait.

---

## 4 Musings for A·Muse(ment)

Lee M. Sloca

---

(1) un·Wanted Ad: 1 dispirited, Asian, lovesick, hoping to go invisible in October.

I resist fate till Kali Ma slaps the yellow off me; so I, promptly, fall all over for Maya. Nowadays, time for good behaviors only sharpens the pang of regrets.

### (2) The Devil's Details

i once told You the best answer about Ix Chel

was Yes

& when i told Ix Chel I love Maya

She said Yes

& when i told our future goodbye

You said Yes

How could the Goddess

& my heart be so Evil

### (3) 40 Days + 40 Nights In the Bosom of the Blessed Virgin

After renouncing Her,

I sank three days without water.

I stomached weeks without food.

Then dehydration laughed crazy:  
the headaches,  
nausea, delirium, seizure  
then  
finally the vomiting.  
Only, only then,  
did I believe in crying  
but  
I had no tear  
left.  
Just like the first time  
when I broke bread with Maya,  
hoping to Mar(r)y Her.

**(4) Common Zen(se)**

I pract(ice) at the (he)art  
of butter(fly)ing  
past 1 hurri(can)e  
Maya  
at a  
ti(me)



---

# Seven Meditations

Anne Brooke

---

## MEDITATION 56

The desert expands  
as far as the eye

can stretch.  
But the door

you seek  
is so small

it falls between words.  
How can you find

one speck of gold  
amongst so many?

Listen to the secret pattern  
of your thoughts:

let your slow feet  
follow.

MEDITATION 57

In the midst  
of all that sprinkling

of oil and blood  
to purify the men

for their holy,  
unknowable task,

it is of course  
the women who do the washing.

## MEDITATION 58

A thousand rituals  
to avoid the rhythmic beat

of the light  
but finally it comes,

breaking through  
when you are least ready.

Mercy is not weighed  
in these familiar scales.

## MEDITATION 59

You hold your grief  
in silence,

letting only the dying fire  
speak.

Sometimes words  
say nothing,

cannot match  
the heart.

Imprison the truth  
in your mouth's bitterness

and taste it  
to the full.

MEDITATION 60

I'm pleased that camel,  
rock-badger and rabbit

escape the call  
of the cooking pot,

but I'm not too worried  
about moles, rats

or mice.  
Hurry through the dark streets,

usher the poor, the blind  
and the lame

to a feast  
they have not looked for.

## MEDITATION 61

The purification  
of women  
is a puzzle

men have always pondered.  
Odd how  
a daughter's birth

made a woman  
twice as impure  
as a son's.

I think slowly  
of my own mother's  
purification rite

in a small southern church  
only forty-four years ago  
and understand how

some things never change.

MEDITATION 62

Sores, boils,  
strange white hairs  
in the skin,  
raw flesh, mildew  
and fire.

Too much information  
makes my own skin  
itch.

If salt itself  
is worthless,  
how can we be clean  
at all?

---

## Per Pilosa Ad Astra

John P. Hill

---

A mountain flays the underbelly of the sky, imparting the illusion of motion as though it's not biding its time until conquered but coming to you. Emerging from darkness like a jagged shard of the moon, this avatar of human insignificance instills something worse than disillusion but even less definable than dread. Its permanence mocks your firefly twinkle with the reminder that regardless of any Pyrrhic victories you will lose the waiting game. Staring too long invites visitors. Tiny faces like rough drafts by Edvard Munch cascade down the gnarled slabs, warning those who would approach, morphing, fading, reappearing, a waterfall of specters gliding down this fractured wall of Babel. Which is worse, that these are properties of the mountain, or projections from your exhausted mind? Snowflakes *clack* against the window. You trace an outline and tap the glass like a man gazing into a crystal ball who's trying to alter the contours of its revelations.

Your company is exemplary: from Simeon Stylites to Thoreau, Emerson, and Dillard, visionaries have sought clarity from Nature. Mankind sacrifices something precious for its artificial *modus vivendi*. From a natural perspective you'll come to see city life as no less revolting than a knot of vipers slithering under a rock for warmth. Instead of spending your mornings in traffic snarls, shaving in the rearview mirror and screaming at kamikaze drivers while a vein throbs on your forehead, meditate with the ultimate elder, the mountain. One morning with this master will teach you more than any degree, more than any book. The immediacy of experience is always lost in translation, the same way physics theorems can't convey the spectacular finale of an imploding star.



Do you hear that? It sounds as though Nature herself has summoned you, knocking with the imminence of Beethoven's Fifth, opening a barrier between two antithetic realms to call her fair child home after his sojourn in the abyss. Perhaps true understanding is ubiquitous. You didn't need to climb anything to find it. Can you hear her sweet voice? Why is she speaking Spanish?

It's just the maid. You'll have to leave the room, if not for a walk outside at least to the observatory. The bar? Very well. Perhaps it's best to begin your journey back to Eden by discussing it with your fellow visionaries in a smoky gin mill. The disparity between Paradise and the inferno devised by man will seem even greater. Our bloodlust to destroy as much of Nature as possible will be exposed for what it is: the jealous rage of a failed artist bent on destroying the one standard against which his tinkering will always seem derivative, tawdry, laughable, as nothing at all.



Raucous shouts in strange languages volley across the room, instilling in you the humility of Ptolemaic astronomers discovering they weren't the center of the universe. Another drink? Don't second-guess your sensitive nerves. If that's what it takes to keep those dark thoughts on a short leash, so be it. Soon you will exhaust your demons on frozen hills and exult as they die of exposure on the mountainside.

Don't stare at the disheveled man two stools away. As though you've never engaged in a Socratic dialogue with yourself. He may be on the cusp of a vital conclusion and you scorn him for overstepping a mindless social stricture. No small part of your quest for the Truth in Nature should involve a thoroughgoing interrogation of all social conventions.

"It's like they've all agreed not to talk about it, so anyone who does is crazy," he says, chewing a fingernail that shouldn't be harvested for at least two weeks. Eyes as pink as raw salmon protrude from dark puffy lids.

*He'd be having this same conversation even if I wasn't here,* you realize, feeling as though you've stumbled onto the set of an animatronic creation going through its preprogrammed routine. You have, but the stage is far larger than you think. What programmed it, and why?

"Is insanity determined by consensus or biology?" he says. "It's nothing but a curse they cast on malcontents who call attention to unpleasant truths, a blood libel against nonconformists."

*There but for the grace of God.*

Don't tell yourself that. He chose this path. You're not even tempted to argue with yourself in a crowded bar. (Right?)

"And people have seen it," he says. "That's what I don't understand."

No, the only thing that needs "a good bath" is your harsh criticism. Do you think John Muir bathed everyday? Why should vain concerns of the flesh take precedence over the imperatives of the heart? Isn't this the mindset you're hoping to realign? The boy has left the city. Now the city, that defiler of the soul, must leave the boy.

"Seen what?" you say.

"The Abominable Unau. Are you pretending you haven't heard about it?"

"I just checked in. I came here to relax. My boss told me to take some time off." *So I don't wind up like you.*

Why has lashing out become your primary instinct? Has confinement to a cubicle atrophied your instincts, turning you into a confused and desperate predator with no prey save those you relegate to the status of losers? And this is what they mean by "civilization."

"It lives in a cave on the Cephalopod Plateau." He tugs up his sleeve to reveal a hand like a blackened lobster claw and points at a map on the wall where skull and crossbones dot a jagged outline rising to the ceiling. "About a fifth of the way up the east side of the mountain I had to hide for two days in the snow. I dug a burrow with my hands. Now look at them."

Sensing the flame that kindles inside each man, all of which come from the same fire started by the primeval arsonist, you warm to the tragic

character. “How do you know it was the abominable eunuch?” *I suppose I’d be abominable too if deprived of the sole reason not to discharge a .357 into my mouth. Wouldn’t life in a cave only compound the misery? Jake Barnes took up fishing.*

“Unua! Abominable *Unau*. You just want to mock me like all the rest of them.”

“I’m sorry. I misunderstood. You mean it’s a Megatherium, a prehistoric ground sloth?”

“One and the same.”

“How can it be abominable if it’s a sloth?” *Does it smell like you?*

Callow, cruel, yet demonstrative: in the way flippers once became feet, our lust to slaughter those different from us survives as a need to ostracize them. Hopefully the crimson tint of your soul will be cleansed in the mountain snow.

“It’s the size of three elephants,” he says. “It was coming after me.”

“Aren’t they vegetarians? How can there be only one? Does it split in two every twenty years? A single representative of a species can’t survive. That’s why talk about the Loch Ness Monster and Bigfoot is suspicious.” The bartender raises her eyebrows. Pray she doesn’t ask you to explain that. In the funhouse mirror of a stranger’s eyes you can appear as a scholar or hero, but not for long. Soon a brood of miscreants will appear, writhing and cavorting in obscene mockery of your carefully sorted assessments. Which is the accurate reflection? Or, as you suspect, are they all imposters?

“Watch your back. It’s up there.”

“The abominable eyebrow -- I mean *unau*?”

He glowers at you, looks away, and slouches over his drink like a mangy squirrel holding a nut.

On the way back to the room you announce, “Tomorrow I’m going to climb the mountain,” as if by saying it out loud you sign a treaty of unconditional surrender to the future. On the bed you close your eyes, entering the interstellar craft that transports you from the dying galaxy of Today to that next distant star system, Tomorrow. Has it always existed,

awaiting your arrival in a craft with no controls? Ponder this well, little spaceman. Rage against the dying of the light? Very well. Order a block of those movies you enjoy so much.

In the darkness Mount Typhoeus persists. Do you think it's watching? Can you hear it laughing? Maybe you should ask for a room on the other side or board the window up.

"I'm not hiding. I'm going to climb the damn thing tomorrow."

You loosen your robe and try to relax. Finally your movies start. Those "actresses" you admire leap from the screen and prance through the soundstage in your mind. The special effects team of your imagination transforms the dimpled rolls of pasty flesh under your chest into a rippled wall of muscle. Like a million spam promises incarnate, your "pens becomes hug."

But why are you bothering to impress imaginary women with radical metamorphoses? Why not create them innately desirous of your current proportions? You, artisan and architect, hold the power to unchain the sun from this parallel world. Are its parameters good because you decree them, or do you decree them because they're good? Resolve this dilemma or stand mute with terror if one of the *Nurses Gone Wild* says, "Shall not the judge of the whole world act justly?"

*I'm thinking way too much. Need to relax. Be reasonable. No one questions the metaphysical foundation of his fantasies. It's the stress. Dr. Schlotski said it took years to accrue and won't disappear overnight.* "Room service? Could you send up another shrimp cocktail? Great. And another bottle of that fizzy wine."

Reasonable? Maybe that's the problem. Your steadfast ally has betrayed you. It's been deceiving you all along. Most men never figure this out. (Most don't have much to betray them in the first place. Maybe they're the lucky ones.) It may have sufficed to fill out the occasional tax form, but reliance on it for The Big Questions requires a long jump of faith.

"But Reason finds the truth," you say.

Ask Zeno about its utility. Should you trust a force that can disprove the possibility of motion? Ask Sextus Empiricus and the rest of the ancient

skeptics, so bewildered and exhausted they resorted to following the example of brutes just to avoid the misery of making judgments: “Reason can prove anything, so we live according to custom.” Ask David Hume: “Reason is the slave of the passions.” It can’t even verify that the future will resemble the past, that the sun will rise in the east. Maybe you should avoid Martin Luther for now, unless you want a longer list of indictments against the “Devil’s whore.” Its practical application doesn’t extend beyond pure mathematics. If you inquire politely, its most comforting assurance is that “you” aren’t here now: the self is a conceptual bewitchment, a bundle of sensations that scarcely remain static long enough to warrant a name. What execratory metaphors will suffice to denounce this charlatan, this imposter, this confidence man? Reason, is it not a she-male who seemed so alluring, so perfectly feminine before it got in the car? Is it not a --

Yes, yes, you’re a well-endowed patient with three nurses fawning over you. It’s only stress. Be reasonable.



You set out. The sun pools on the snow like orange juice. It is not impossible that in 3,700,000 years a group of archeologists will uncover a trail of hominid footprints on an open plain approaching the base of the mountain. Even the most cursory examination will reveal that you made frequent stops to look back, as though unsure of the destination or longing to return to the point of departure. They will infer a commensurately large brain, irreconcilable with the fact that an intelligent primate would have been hunting, gathering, or belly to belly with a mate -- not engaging in a pell-mell swing of the basket containing all its eggs.

Stoking your confidence, dispatching a legion of brave warriors into the hinterland of fear itself, you say, “The mountain is nothing more than a hilly hill. It isn’t frightening. I was letting a word freak me out.”

Then why are you bothering to conquer it? Why not try for a higher

score on one of your video games, or convince yourself that the greatest accomplishment in life is drinking champagne in the bath and go for it? Be careful: by deflating the stakes of an undertaking you lessen its significance. The nature of some things exists independently of how we think about them, cyanide for instance.

A freight train wind blares past, stirring the sands of an albino desert. Against a pumpkin-gut horizon juts a dark graph of stock market chaos, gleaming like some shattered jug. Its defiance of harmonious design and spatial economy demonstrates that man is not the measure of all things. Desperate to break free of an earthly tether but doomed to linger in torment, a halo of vapor buffets the serrated peak. You approach the ruined beacon, a colorful beetle crawling across a floor of white marble. The bottom commands apprehensive vigilance like the gnarled hand of a sleeping giant.

With the speed of ivy growing up the side of a temple, you climb over spinal spurs of rock. Crisscrossing the sides, they bespeak serpents in the midst of a mating ritual that were smothered by a blanket of volcanic ash. A circular ledge protrudes; if not abandoned by a Roc or pterodactyl, it's coincidentally structured to inflict such an impression on hapless creatures who interpret all things as intentionally designed, including themselves but excluding whatever designed them.

On the Cephalopod Plateau you wade through lacteous mist billowing like a robe trailed by some mythic king. Mutant ice shapes resemble neither men nor beasts, their design akin to the deranged webs spun by spiders wild on potions. Perhaps a cannibalistic tribe built these gruesome Moai during the throes of vision quests conducted by intemperate shamans.

“These things are called seracs. I’ll camp here. It’s no big deal.”

Like diluted sunlight outlining a slab of coral under fathoms of water, the moon discharges a turquoise haze over a basilisk of ice across from your tent. The lantern’s meager glimmer transforms your can of sardines into a brick of silver. You brace it on your thigh and tug the pull-top. Like a grenade held too long, it explodes, discharging silver satellites and filling the tent with a yellow mist. Once the fog of war settles, a casualty cries out with the lamentation of

a distant battleground. “Mustard! There’s mustard in my eyes!”

Outside, impervious to your execrations, the ice shapes flank the tent like gargoyles guarding an egg. Arms and tentacles seem to reach despite their immobility. Petrified features leer in horror, permitting only interpretations of anguish and the conviction that were these ashen demons animated they would crave the oblivion stolen from them.



After a sleepless night you pack up the tent. “I’m really roughing it, getting back to Nature, conquering the mountain. Regardless of any hardships this is an amazing accomplishment.”

Of your own volition you’ve dispensed with 5,000 years of civilization, placed yourself in a position where survival warrants an A+, and you’re proud of this? You already had survival. You haven’t transcended the playing field. You’ve knocked over the goalposts, turning an absurd and tedious game into a perilous one.

“Just me and Nature,” you say, commencing your journey. “The way it was meant to be.”

*Meant?* By whom? Can there be intentions in the absence of an intender? Most perplexing of all, what *is* Nature? Are you deifying your sensory impressions of the external world? How intellectually lazy. Or is Nature an orchestra with a hidden composer? Is he more like Bach, or Webern? Only a fool or liar would claim to enjoy most of the compositions (schizophrenia, genital warts, hemorrhoids). You’re not brown-nosing, are you?

“No people, no stupid boss, no schedules, total freedom,” you shout, pumping your fists. Your voice returns and returns as though rejected by a series of incredulous doorkeepers to some great repository of utterances.

*Freedom?* Your wretched cubicle at work was not a prison, but an ersatz shell protecting the tender little hermit crab of your mind from a pitiless beach with a thousand predators. Have you ever been more acutely aware

of your limitations? Reach up. That fathomless blue, would it be any more comprehensible if you could touch it? That thumping in your chest, its machinations no less unfathomable than whether order preceded matter, have you any idea who placed it there, or why?

“Think about something else,” you say, picking up the pace. “Should have climbed with someone.”

But you did. Your shadow marches beside you like a solemn second at a duel. If the difference between men is a function of the mark they leave upon this world, your companion is separated from you by hues of gray soon to be rendered imperceptible by the blinding light of Time.

“Dr. Ferguson was right,” you say. “Situations where the outcome is dependent on my decisions are empowering.”

Perhaps if you’d spent your weekly sessions listening instead of envisaging her in medieval dungeons you’d see the folly of this. You’re helpless. Not because you’re hiking all alone; *because you are all alone*. Behold the ball of orange fire smearing the sky. The only thing standing between you and no-you is an unknown but definite number of its journeys concluding in a dark voyage that will not be made in the company of revelers. Pitch your rope and anchor it before it’s too late.

“Maybe I should spend another day up here,” you say, removing your gloves and scratching your ears and squinting with justified horror at the millions of chalky particles *whooshing* past your boots at the dictate of forces unseen. If afflicted with the agony of consciousness, each would attribute these senseless voyages to its own free will, just as you do.

“Head north,” you say, slaking the need for the sound of a human voice. “I’m heading toward Gulliver’s Gulch. Then it’s up the east side. I feel better already. My head feels clearer.”

But do you like this clarity? Your new acquaintances, those awkward questions that are scarcely askable, they’ll wait for you. They’ll lie in wait for you. Admit it: your detached observations have left you as mystified as a donkey watching a spin cycle. Who are you fooling? Slack-jawed awe is not the same thing as understanding. The riddles of existence will not be solved



by giving them names. What would constitute understanding them? You can't step outside the framework to ponder it, and if you could your thoughts would be confined within another one. Are you not suffocating?

You shield your eyes from the sun, reeling from the vertigo one ought to feel when looking down a well millions of miles deep at a pool of fire. As though threatening a squatter with violence if he doesn't walk from the premises with his hands up, you cry, "Who or what is responsible for all this?"

Who indeed? Is this Cosmic Riddler best described as benevolent, indifferent, *or sadistic*? To ask the question is to answer it: the fact that the latter two adjectives are tenable candidates reflects poorly on the first. Sure, head back. Postpone your jaunt for a day or four. Maybe you won't think about this at the hotel (it certainly never bothered you in your cubicle at work). Sit at the bar with your eccentric friend. Maybe his earthy aroma will ward off the pestiferous queries, the way garlic deters vampires. If only enlightenment came with a warning. You can't know ahead of time if you'll like it, and when you have it there's no guarantee you can ever be free of it. You thought your quest for the Truth in Nature would buck you up and bandage your exposed nerves? Amsterdam may have been a better choice. At least you know what awaits.

Why are you covering your ears and running? These questions don't emanate from the snowy mounds, but the very bowels of Being. You finally have your finger on the pulse of things and --

Ouch. That looked painful. Don't try to stand. Your ankle's the size of a cantaloupe. Not that the opinion of your imbecilic peers counts for anything -- they are, after all, trapped in the same forsaken trench as you, awaiting the absent-minded sniper, Time, to dispatch them -- but by spraining an ankle on a lowly plateau you've gifted them with years of mirth at the water-cooler. Explain how you were perplexed by the grandeur of Nature, the mystery of reality, the ineffability of your heartbeat, and had to retreat to the stultifying contrivances of man. They'll understand. They might not be a passenger in your car ever again, but they'll --

Why are you stuffing snow in your ears and screaming? These are

legitimate philosophic inquiries. They just occurred to you under less than ideal circumstances. Maybe they won't return, or only when you're safe at home, rounding third base with that hottie from the local bar. She'll understand too. Tell her the primordial strangeness of things has enervated the little spout through which generations pass, the meaty pipe that connects the past to the future, that populates this asylum with fresh inmates. Tell her you'll call as soon as the cocoon of normalcy returns to solidify it.

Don't bury your head in the snow. You'll get frostbite. The scars on your face, coactive with the thunderstruck stare in your eyes, will mark you as a soul in torment. Apropos, but some conditions are best left undisclosed. Existential crises used to be all the rage. No longer. Rather than commiserating with you for joining the bedeviled fraction of men who have glimpsed our true condition, they'll whack you out with so many meds you'll need to wear a Hawaiian shirt to hide the drool stains.

"I feel woozy. I'll pitch the tent here, catch my breath, wrap my ankle. Maybe the swelling will go down by tomorrow. Dr. Ferguson said adversity is a test."

Did she say that in your chimerical Tower of London? (Did you pass those tests? Why do you keep repeating them?) A test is a means of excavating knowledge from the dark mine of the unknown. Why would a being who knows everything need to resort to them? Maybe he just delights in these spectacles. Perhaps he's oblivious to your torments, in the way you know nothing about the suffering of the insects in your garden. Why is he making it snow?

Your tent becomes a satellite lost in a universe of stars. Yes, all snowflakes are the same, tediously so, just like all days, just like all women. The treacherous force of optimism that deludes you into seeing variety where none exists, if only it could be personified and you could crush its skull with a rock. (But could you live without it?) Zip the tent shut. Try the sardines in spring water. They won't be as caustic if there's an accident.



The spirit of chaos freed, a tempest rages, obliterating the forms of things and returning them to the blurry potentiality from which they emerged. Onward you hobble like some curious elf sneaking into the forbidden chamber of an evil wizard. Nature's volatile moods and the devastation they wreak, her apocalyptic fury manifested in all epochs and places, are they not her rage against misbegotten creatures, her longing to undo what cannot be undone, what cannot be eradicated? With earthquakes and hurricanes she rends her garments. Pestilences and plagues are not pangs of birth; they are pangs of regret. Humanity, is it not a mongoloid love child whose mother wishes she'd had an abortion?

An amebic shape solidifies in the static ahead. Thirty feet tall, it lurches toward you, shuffling on the sides of feet that are little more than sickles protruding from furry stumps. Long front legs stretch like the arms of an old witch reaching across a table to read a palm. Is reality parting the curtains on the farce of life to allow a character from an earlier act to take a final bow? Through veils of snow appears a nose with the contours and padding of a leather recliner, infringing on space that should have been reserved for its tiny eyes. A grim message accompanies the beast, a stench so foul and curdled the messenger will never again convey the redolence of honeysuckle or rain drying on rocks.

Get down, you fool! You can't outrun it. Do you think it will understand you were screaming in agony as you collapsed, not provocation?

Allegedly erased for all eternity from the ledger of life, presumed to have plunged into that gorge awaiting us all, it stands triumphant, in absolute defiance of Time and Nature and all man's theories and measurements, which measure nothing at all, not even man. The wind howls in disbelief at this zombie returned from the dead. It throws back its head and makes a deep gurgling noise that sends tremors across the ground.

In lieu of girding your loins, you wet them. It looks down with the eyes

of a faithful dog, sniffs, and stoops until its nose is inches from your face. The breeze from its inhalation sucks your hair straight up. How do you appear to it, as the pinnacle of Being, the *raison d'être* of existence, the *summon bonum* of creation, a member of the almighty species who spread its fungal growth to the moon, erecting temples to vanity in the dark heavens? Does it know that man hath dominion over it? No, eat sees a bug too big to eat.

A triumphant thought emerges, characterized by Stoic contempt of death. *This is no worse than any other way of dying.*

Perhaps the rigors of dialectic aren't welcome at times such as this, but being mauled by a mysterious behemoth is immeasurably worse than drifting off in a Jacuzzi, or going out with a *Bang!* during a tryst with one of the locals. (Don't worry: by means of keepsakes such as your watch and credit cards she'd get over it. Quickly.)

A face like the front of an Edsel cocks from side to side. Can you be certain this is not some atavistic assassin seeking vicarious atonement for the genocide of its kind at the blood-stained nubs of wily and rapacious and wastrel apes? It needn't have bothered. Prehistory repeats itself. Reversals arrive without heralds and the next masters, be they microbes or roaches or robots or radioactive dust, will not bring justice, only change. Unless the ineludible nullity of all things *is* Justice.

It licks your head with what feels like a waterbed wrapped in sandpaper. You reach up and rub its thick fur, perhaps the first human to do this in 100 centuries. Without any deliberation you clutch its underbelly. Nor is it an instinct. Perhaps the most momentous decisions in life and History are devoid of causes.



Liberated from the cruel chains of consciousness, you need no gerrymandered theology or philosophy to justify your condition. An intrinsic good requires neither apologists nor acolytes nor proselytizers. Awake, your

soul rowed a sinking vessel against the current in a brimstone whirlpool. Now, in heavenly slumber, you float through a crystal ether. Comic and pathetic in equal measure, you once believed the absurd propaganda about your senses connecting you to reality. In fact, they manacled you in a dark and fetid dungeon from which you would not have escaped.

Searching for sustenance in depleted waters, a thought surfaces, the first sign of life in days. *The obscene shadow play of my waking life, that nightmare of a nightmare of a nightmare, if that constituted Reality then our obsession for it is worse than a foot fetish.*

Your discovery, the bitter fruit of experience, is not new. A wise man once said the enjoyment of life is proportionate to how little we feel it, hence the bliss of intoxication. By what standard should sentience be preferred to slumber? Which is more fundamental, more *natural*? A larger question follows, much larger, the largest of all: By what measure is Something preferable to Nothing? Which is eternal, which the twinkling aberrance? Did the Maker once wrest with such questions before pronouncing his maiden production “good,” for by what measure was it so? If the avouchment entailed its own truth, the preexistent void could have been affirmed. Was the preference for Something as opposed to Nothing arbitrary?

You open your eyes. Stalagmite tusks surround blue rotunda caps of giant ice mushrooms. The Abominable Unau clings to an oak-thick root, cradling you on the hammock of its belly. Unnamed shades of purple light illumine the mist of its breath, which bathes you in a fetid brume. Far below, gray and yellow calcite nubs protrude like arms struggling to escape a fiendish concoction.

*But what if I die here?*

You yawn, regarding such trivial misconceptions with the indifference they warrant. All you’ve heard and read about Death is wedding night advice from virgins, physics lectures from kindergarteners. Your thoughts on this subject are no less privileged than any others. There is no Einstein of this discipline.

Had you been paying attention rather than worrying about your receding

hairline and whether your neighbors have a bigger snow blower, Life would have schooled you in the prerequisite courses. The child you once were: so bright and full of promise and expectations; passionate about baseball; eager to please his teachers; intrigued by setting fires; fearless seeker of admiration from his classmates by using the urinals inappropriately; the little Dionysian who drank ketchup and ate worms. Where is he now?

*He evolved. Strands of continuity link me to him.*

Save that contrived article of faith for those incapable of honest introspection. The eager young fire starter died a long time ago. Any resemblance between you and he is coincidental. You get to keep shards of his memories by default. Regarding those photographs of him your mother entrusted to you, where else could she deposit them? Who has more invested in this illusion than her? Some nights, when you looked away from the neon in the window at Heartbreakers, away from the lights gleaming on the stage and the harsh brown anesthetic in your glass, the dancer's expression changed from revulsion to pity because she could see the shadow of his tombstone in your eyes.

And the courageous Peeping Tom from high school? To what Elba has he been exiled? The man who remains is an imposter, a fraud who has neither the courage to peek in the Rezinski sisters' window nor throw an egg at a police car nor ingest PCP before a first date. And in thirty years all vestiges of the current stranger will vanish too. He and his fitful dedication to finding the truth behind 9-11 and chemtrails will perish, evicted by a surly derelict devoted to watching the Weather Channel and finding an herbal treatment for type-two diabetes (*anything* that doesn't involve a renunciation of Kentucky Fried Chicken). Descartes was wrong. You can doubt your own existence. Read an old diary entry. What is it that exists?

Fear of Death indeed! "You" were never here in the first place.

"Only sleep is real," you say, pulling a blanket of fur across your chest. The Abominable Unau licks your head. "Consciousness is nothing but another survival gimmick Mother Nature is testing, like a turtle's shell or a mosquito's stinger. Plants and all sorts of sea critters did fine for billions of years without

thinking. Why does anything need it?” You scratch the Abominable Unau’s chest. “The biggest land mammal of all time was awake for one hour a day.” It emits a baritone purr. You close your eyes.

Those desperate measures you once took to escape from “Reality” were unnecessary. There is no such place. With endless bouts of intoxication and obsessive daydreams you were like a man convinced he’s the victim of a worldwide conspiracy who covers his windows with tinfoil and has the fillings removed from his teeth.

You close your eyes and escape the bane of being human, fleeing the barbwire maze of concepts and returning to the Eden from which man was expelled by virtue of his creation. Thoughts, those annoying wasps whose stings you fled, those ephemeral confetti flakes so agonizingly strange yet regarded as mundane, *of those you expected Truth*, arranging and rearranging them, regarding with extravagant gravitas their meanings and hierarchy, not unlike a child placing paper plates and plastic cups on a blanket, preparing a tea party for dolls and cats and make-believe friends while dark clouds roll in and a cold breeze flaps the tablecloth and thunder growls on the horizon.

You drift through a blizzard of solar systems, no more lost than anything else. Thoughts of conquering the mountain vanish when you grasp the spectacular triviality of anything occurring anywhere within these ghostly grains. (Of a multitude of viewpoints, could this be the one with the greatest claim to objectivity?) Visions of Dr. Schlotski and a team of *Nurses Gone Wild* dance through your mind like the phantasmagoric afterimages parading across a child’s tired lids the night following a day at the fair. Your thoughts fade, replaced by nothing.

Towering over you, surrounding you, a geological Rorschach absorbing the frustrations and futile dreams of a new species of ant chasing the wind up its indifferent sides, the 50,000,000-year-old distention of rock recently nicknamed “Mount Typhoeus” abides, aroused from the sleep of Nothing by causes no less contingent than those guilty of concocting man, remaining at the fool’s banquet of Existence for “reasons” just as arbitrary. And when they’re gone, regardless of how many climbed it or what they planted on its

top, it will abide just the same.

Until it doesn't.



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## Heresies

Raymond Luczak

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“The Bible shows the way to go to heaven, not the way the heavens go.”

—Galileo Galilei

For centuries, people in Europe believed that the Bible held the key to nature’s inner workings. Why not? The earth was the center of the universe. Then came the first refracting telescopes. Nicolaus Copernicus proved that the sun was the center around which the pithy Earth spun days and nights.

*The divine giant stood tall,  
his shoulders wider than the earth’s,  
blocking the mother’s glare of sun,  
as he twisted and turned to throw  
a discus full of stars,  
spinning and spewing out  
against the moon’s curtain.  
He was proud of nailing  
all the constellations.  
Every single time.*

Later, Galileo Galilei wrote a little book, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, comparing the Copernican theory of the sun being the more powerful against the church’s view of the Earth being the center of all what

God had created.

*The divine giant stood by  
as he listened to the builders heave  
mortar and brick, weaving  
like a peel of apple rind  
up into the heavens past his gaze.  
He bent his ear to their murmurs  
of a single language spoken  
all in the name of God.  
(But just who was God, really?  
And how could one God handle  
all of the universe all at once?)  
He blew a whisper into its top corridor,  
like a marble down a chute,  
wiping out the one language  
of their self-appointed glories,  
steamrolling the seven continents.  
Confusion was their new language.*

The Inquisition took notice of how Galileo gave the sun better treatment. It was enough to put him on trial. But he refused to back down. Heliocentrism was indeed a truth. Forced to recant, he eventually lived the rest of his days under house arrest.

*The divine giant rested his head  
next to the tiny house where the little giant  
telescoped the stars and the planets  
with the occasional scribble against paper.  
He listened to the mice-like steps  
puttering around inside the house.  
The sound was comforting, like music,*

*knowing that angels of reason existed.  
It was the sweetest nap.*

In 1992, Pope John Paul II finally vindicated Galileo: “The error of the theologians of the time . . . was to think that our understanding of the physical world’s structure was . . . imposed by the literal sense of Sacred Scripture.”

*The divine giant’s tired after centuries  
of spinning stars and sleeping next to angels.  
He sits on the Rock of Gibraltar,  
ignoring the tourist ants with their cameras.  
He stands up and stretches his arms,  
pushing against the film of ozone,  
before he slams one foot into the Alborán Sea.  
The waves hurl and puddle all over Rome,  
dripping down the walls of St. Peter’s Basilica  
while pilgrims in pews take flight, thinking  
the Book of Revelations had finally begun.  
Michelangelo’s angels in the Sistine Chapel  
continue to beat their wings, watching  
the universe being created for the umpteenth time,  
the touch between God and man electrifying.  
They are only messengers of truth.*

By then, it was too late for the Church to save face. Galileo’s children, blessed with prodigal talents in astronomy, physics, and engineering over the centuries, had already dismantled the mysteries of the universe, exposing the forces of nature until there weren’t enough believers left willing to tithe their entire lives to the holy men hiding behind the great folds of God’s robe. Betrayal had become too much of a dogma.

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# The Twelve Olympians

*deep under the Parthenon, Athens, Greece*

Raymond Luczak

---

## 1.

Six millennia is too long a time to sleep  
in exile. The Greek gods dreamed of revenge  
against the Romans who ransacked  
their family histories only because  
they themselves had so few inspiring heroes  
of their own. They were renamed,  
misplacing honor on most of the planets  
revolving around Mount Olympus:  
Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Neptune, Saturn.

As centuries passed like pages turning,  
mortals above the ground learned  
how to be an army of little Jupiters.  
There was always room for improvement:  
arrows, horses, chest armors, bayonets,  
battleships, planes, bombs, submarines,  
grenades, machine guns, atomic bombs.  
All had to be fine-tuned for maximum efficiency.  
Biological and chemical warfare  
has never sounded so tasty. Just think!  
Supreme power all theirs with a single command.

2.

Down in the Hades, where these gods and goddesses  
neutered of their powers but not of their legends  
slept, dreams slumbered among the Doric columns  
standing guard at the Parthenon. They wept  
when other invaders tried to knock it down.  
They never quite recovered. The power  
of nightmares in that alchemy of power and greed  
was much too strong. Restlessness  
left dark bags the color of Kalamata olives  
under their eyes, now a family trademark,  
their first fatality of mortality.

They worried about signs of impending death:  
ulcers, migraines, fevers, cramps, aches.  
In the limbo land between forever and death  
they awaited the verdict on their bodies.  
But none came. Biopsies taken of  
their nightmares came up black as ever.  
Poppies in the hands of Morpheus,  
the god of dreams, turned into coal petals.  
Fits and coughs of opium interrupted  
everyone's hope for peace in the dim.

3.

When the little Jupiters and Junos  
started dropping in spasms of heat stroke,  
the faint thuds sounded like the first drops  
of rain, slow but sure of its thunderous slaps  
hitting across the hollowing face of the earth.  
The sound of bodies falling in clusters was  
closest to the sound of rain never heard again.  
The sun left behind puddles of charred remains  
on Madison Avenue, Rodeo Drive, Main Street.  
Even the wings of vultures caught fire.

Far below the umbrella of soil and rock,  
the immortal dreamers fidgeted. Icarus,  
once regarded as raving mad  
from melting his wax wings, awoke  
suddenly. “Sh! Listen.”  
They stared up, hearing the drum-taps  
of bodies beating the taut ground,  
the sweetest funeral they so long awaited.

4.

Lives of Jupiters and Junos were driven  
underground beneath the biodome roof  
of pesticide-free grazing lands,  
where no windows showed the absence  
of clouds and rain.  
It was much better this way.

As the shadow of season slightly shifted,  
children, never having been outside,  
asked their parents while watching  
on their holographic screens  
Gene Kelly spinning around while drenched  
in *Singin' in the Rain*. Parents,  
remembering stories passed down  
from generation to generation,  
tried not to sob. “Mom, what’s wrong?”  
“Nothing. Rain was such a long time ago.”

5.

Back then the raining didn't stop for a year.  
The stink of death was soon duned by sand.  
In the shock of silence that followed,  
the mist of Zeus, the greatness of Greece,  
appeared with a neon gesture upward.

The great trapdoor to the beyond opened.  
Sand rushed into the hourglass passageway  
but these gods and goddesses were sheathed  
in a flurry of white cloth and buskins,  
auras against weather and danger.

But nothing in their dreams prepared them  
for their slow procession up the great steps  
into the Acropolis. All around them was sand,  
rubbing down marble friezes until smooth.  
Cracks of acid rain and carbon dioxide exhaust  
seeped everywhere in the steps like vines  
among skeletons of stray cats, picked clean  
by rats at night. Sand whispered *shhhhh*.  
Worse yet was the strange buildings  
made of glass, metal, and garish awnings.  
Letters in Greek looked different from millennia ago,  
and letters in English looked, well, ugly  
with its squiggles. They showed no grace of elegance.



6.

High above the crumbled Parthenon,  
solar-powered surveillance cameras  
snapped awake to the strange movement  
of large-sized creatures marching  
a wide swath up the tourist-worn steps.  
It had been decades since a mortal  
climbed these heart-stopping steps.

As the holographic images of  
these twelve in flowing robes flickered on,  
the murmur of activity among  
the survivors stopped. Who were they?  
They couldn't see their faces.  
Their arms were exposed!  
How could these people not collapse  
from not wearing sun protector clothes?

Cascades of brilliant white  
fabric flapping in the wind behind them  
shone brighter than the sun.

7.

Mothers and nurses sang Madonna  
to the newborns: “Rain, feel it  
on my fingertips / Hear it  
on my window pane . . .”  
Late at night they left the sound  
of recorded pitter-patter on  
to keep babies in deep slumber.

Around the turn of the 21st century,  
people left a DVD of logs burning  
inside a fireplace on their televisions  
at Christmastime. These days  
the hologram plays rain hitting the window.

Everywhere else images of winter  
in all its baroque barrenness  
and luminous loneliness  
hang, a song from holidays of yore.

8.

As the surveillance cameras followed,  
their chiseled faces began to radiate  
as they reached the Parthenon itself.

Winds collapsed into a cloud of stillness:  
The mists of sand evaporated:  
They were clearly not of this earth.

As they surveyed Athens below,  
they saw the Sarona Gulf, a caked desert.

They smiled knowingly at each other.  
They closed their eyes, dreaming.

Clouds appeared, tumbling out from the blue.  
The temperature dropped to minus three Celsius.  
Their breaths puffed sweetness.  
The first snowflakes in nearly three centuries fell.  
The snow became a blizzard.

The decibels of joy from afar broke the sound barrier.

Solarpods from all the biodomes sped to Athens.

But there was no snow, no sea. They searched  
the Acropolis for these creatures. Nothing.

9.

No church exists in the biodomes.  
No just God would allow 9.1 billion people  
to die so quickly. Not if they had gone  
to Sunday school and worshipped!

But late at night, those left behind whisper  
stories about these magical and powerful creatures.  
Mythology, the perfect antidote to science,  
had exacted its revenge. One  
must seek new gods and pray.  
The promise of science is a lousy rain dance.  
Let the new myths begin.

---

# Iyawo

Jaisyn Yemaya

---

Finally blessed in full  
dressed in full  
Sins washed & repaired..  
The spirit has risen above all that will  
be destined.  
Difficulty, loneliness, and heartbreak..  
But above all I have THEM.  
& today is hard but tomorrow won't be..  
& I will cry..& she will cry with me..  
Yemaya I love you..Madrina I love you...  
God I have you!  
and back then I was fooled.  
But  
Today I will not be..Back then that was not me..  
& though still suffering..  
They have freed me.  
Time  
to  
Move forward..not lowered..  
to what you think of me..or even what you want me to be..  
because I will always be..  
above you...

---

## Little Angel

Jaisyn Yemaya

---

Little Angel..

I look at you in fear that I will not see you again.

I look at you and I fear.

I look at you and I fear.

Little Angel..

Your smile melts my soul away.

I look at you in fear that I will not see you again.

I look at you and I fear.

I look at you and I fear.

Little Angel..

You made me forget about myself and love you..&  
your smile melts my soul away.

I look at you in fear that I will not see you again.

I look at you and I fear.

I look at you and I fear.

Little Angel..

Born only a day apart. A day so sacred to both of us..

You made me forget about myself and love you..&  
your smile melts my soul away.

I look at you in fear that I will not see you again.

I look at you and I fear.

I look at you and I fear

Little Angel..

Your wings..have devoured my pain and I have to hold you close..because

Born only a day apart..a day so sacred to both of us..

You made me forget about myself and love you..&

your smile melts my soul away.

I look at you in fear that I will not see you again.

I look at you and I fear.

I look at you and I fear

& you're being taken away ::grabs wing::

Little Angel..

Your wings..have devoured my pain and I have to hold you close..because

Born only a day apart..a day so sacred to both of us..

You made me forget about myself and love you..&

Your smile melts my soul away.

I look at you in fear that I will not see you again.

I look at you and I fear.

I look at you and I fear.

---

## Beast

Jaisyn Yemaya

---

I am a beast  
My body feeds off of positive and  
Negative influences  
I have to believe in both cuz  
negligence of knowledge can destroy me

I cannot fathom ever being  
The one at the bottom  
Well yea I can cuz damn  
I was almost there  
But I know that I can only be on top  
Cocky? Nah more like I just know  
Where I'm at and where I'm going

I am a beast  
My halo is my crown  
Made of the purest halo  
Blue from the hands of Yemaya  
Ridged with waves of respect  
Pride  
arrogance  
I have to have a little of that  
I mean how else am I gonna survive



I have survived what the world has thrown  
At me trying to shatter  
The dignity GOD has given  
But I am every controversial aspect  
Of any conversation on any given day  
So my quick responses will just  
Make you wish you never said anything  
in the first place...

I am a beast..and the world is my dungeon.

---

# Charlie Whiskey

Michael P. McManus

---

Charlie Whiskey smiled, even though he was preparing to die. He sat down against an oak tree and looked up through its leafy canopy. A cloud drifted across the sun. An arm's length away, from a seep, spring water gurgled up from the ground. The water kept his beer cold. He smiled again and took a sip from a can of Rolling Rock. A good gift for the dying, he thought.

He wondered about his death. Would he slump to one side or would he remain upright? How long would it be before his skin started to turn color? And how long before the flies and other insect foraged on his body?

It was comfortable in the forest, unlike the open fields where, after walking a short distance, the heat made him feel uncomfortable. He touched a fern. They were everywhere, these green feathers. Seconds later, he laughed out loud. "Doctor, what would you think of me now?"

He thought of now as it was eight months earlier in downtown Pittsburgh, when Charlie learned about his stomach cancer.

"Well, then, how long do I have to live?" he asked, moments after learning his diagnosis.

"With surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, I estimate one to two years," the doctor said.

"And what will happen if I decide not to enroll in the program?"

"It's my opinion that you will not live longer than two months."

"Two months?"

"Yes, that's it. Without any treatments I think you'll live about two months."

Charlie smiled as he considered the choices, which were not really choices, but ultimatums. Finally, he said, “I’m not going to play a crying game. And I’m not going to let you microwave me as I move forward into eternity. If I got two months left, I better get started living the best I can.”

“But, Charlie,” the doctor said, voicing his concern not only as a physician, but also as a friend who had known Charlie for twenty years, “you’re only forty-four years old.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Four, four. But no one’s carving out most of my stomach. As for the chemo, I’ve seen what it does to people. If I let you do that, I might as well go down to one of the steel mills and jump in the melting pot. But that’s not going to happen. Charlie Whiskey is going to leave this world how he chooses.”

The doctor expressed his resignation to Charlie’s decision by nodding his head. He stood up to shake his hand, while Charlie started grinning as if he had won the lottery.

The following week, Charlie quit his job as a life insurance agent for Slippery Rock Insurance. This ended his seven year streak for being the number one sales agent in western Pennsylvania. On the day he said goodbye to his coworkers, he quit worrying about his diagnosis, because he knew he would live longer than two months.

Three months later, Charlie bought a case of Rolling Rock to celebrate the milestone. From his back porch, where he sat rocking back and forth in his pine rocker, he looked out on the snow-covered Alleghenies. The clean, cold air left Charlie’s lungs aching. Sometimes when he exhaled, Charlie believed he could smell the cancer. It was not unpleasant, he thought of it the smell of reality, the life he had chosen to live, a chance to enjoy some productive leisure time. Charlie loved how those final three words sounded. *Productive leisure time*. Over and over, he said them out loud. He didn’t care that there was no one there to listen.

Charlie didn’t suffer much pain. Many days it was nonexistent, an entity which he once believed would painfully manifest in his bones, tendons, and muscles. But it never did, nor did he lose any weight, and at the beginning of

his eighth month, his weight was a solid, healthy-looking two-hundred and twenty pounds. Still, in spite of this, his endurance was no longer the same. When he walked, he would often stop to catch his breath.

The realization that his eighth month would be his last one alive, came to him as an omnipotent creeping sensation, which felt like sawdust sprinkled on his skin. At times he became melancholy when he considered death and its consequences, but it was brief lasting, like a long exhale. Instead of feeling resentful, Charlie focused on the art of dying. He thought of himself as a backwoods Buddhist monk.

Over four days, Charlie took his time and made two three mile round trips to the little spring where he would die. Each time, he filled his backpack with cans of Rolling Rock, and set off walking down the narrow path that led into the trees. When he reached the spring, he emptied his backpack, and put the beer cans in the water. Then, like a tired, happy pilgrim, he rested while he sipped a beer. He tried resting against several trees until he found one that made him comfortable. He had never been happier in his life.

Now Charlie was resting for the final time in his life, well, for the final time in this world. He wondered if his dead friends and family had gathered in the mystic to wait for him. Hell, he thought, maybe he should have brought some Van Morrison to listen to. But that idea left him as he looked into the woods, sipped his beer, and contemplated his death among the wild things around him. The wind came and went and with each passing the branches stirred above his head and the ferns and rhododendrons rustled. A chipmunk chattered at Charlie's trespass. Like a child, Charlie chattered back until it darted down into a tiny black hole.

Charlie picked up a fistful of pine needles and considered them. Would there be pine needles in the next world? Then, slightly bemused, he wondered if the next world would even have him. He grappled with this by telling himself that it was normal to feel this way. And for this he was thankful that he only had one death. He took a long gulp from his beer to make these thoughts go away. And they did.

He heard crows cawing but he could not see them. When some blue

jays shrieked high above his head, he looked up to find one perched on a branch, its body an emblazoned blue in the sunlight. A cardinal singing in the distance made him smile.

But when the birds went quiet, as if they songs were part of a recording that had been turned off, Charlie's heart began to race. *So this is how it starts*, he thought, looking around, waiting for It to happen. He anticipated that darkness would overtake him, and he wondered if he would remain alive long enough to see the colors change like light passing through a prism. When he was gone would he be able to remember this transformation when his consciousness evolved to wherever it was going? These thoughts passed through him with a kind of speed that was faster and more unsettling than anything he had ever experienced. He looked around. Adrenaline raced through him, his arms tingled, and he began to breath faster. *It's coming*, he thought. *It's coming!*

"What the hell," he said, undone by what had taken place. "What the hell is happening here?"

She did not appear fearful or surprised as she stopped and looked down at him. "Hello." She greeted him in a conciliatory voice which, while expressing its concern, did not seem patronizing. "I'm sorry if I scared you. I didn't mean to. I would never try to scare anybody."

Charlie hesitated before he answered. Her eyes kept looking into his. For what seemed like a long time (it was only seconds) the sound of her voice lingered in the air like the bird songs he heard moments ago. For all its innocence, her voice still possessed such confidence, Charlie believed it was out of character for a girl her age, for she was no older than eighteen or nineteen. Between sips of beer, he studied her long black hair that ran down to her middle back. She wore brown sandals. Her toes were painted red. A green tattoo of a Celtic chain snaked around her right ankle.

"What are you doing out here?" he asked. It was the only thing he could think to say as he looked up into her blue eyes.

"Walking and thinking. I love to do those things. Walk and think. Especially on days like today. Isn't it beautiful out here?"

Charlie gulped his beer, hoping he didn't look like a slob. She was about five feet tall, with small hands and delicate wrists. He had never met a young girl who smiled so easily around a stranger. Her copper-colored tan was the most perfect one he had seen in his life.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"For what?" Her eyes narrowed.

"I should have introduced myself. My name is Charlie Whiskey."

"Really? Cool. I love your name. It's wonderful and mysterious." She laughed and at once the birds started to sing again. "Oh. I'm so rude. Here I am talking about your name and I didn't even give you mine." She giggled as she brushed a ladybug off her nose. "My name is Godiva. But all my friends call me G. If you want you can call me that too. I don't mind."

Charlie thought she might have been a dancer in the way her muscles twitched when her lithe body move in the slightest way. Her khaki shorts came halfway down her thighs, while her flat stomach, with its rippled laces of muscle would have made any athlete proud. Her stomach showed because she wore a black bikini top. Yet, for all this beautiful symmetry, Charlie was moved most by her face with its firm rounded cheekbones; a delicate nose above her thin upper lip, which, when she smiled, seemed to pull open her eyes and intensify the light that was already there. And smile she did. And laugh.

He took one more look at her legs. Stop it, Charlie, he thought. Stop thinking like that. But he was pleased that the cancer had not taken away his desire.

"G, it's nice to meet you." Charlie laughed. "Did that sound right, G?"

She brushed her hair to the side, showing the supple curve of her jaw. "Yes, it did. It sounded perfect. Would you tell me how you got your name? I hope you don't think I'm nosey or something."

"Or something?" Charlie laughed again. "Sure, I'll tell you. My Father was a Sioux Indian who drank too much and lived too little. He died when I was very young. In any case his last name was Whiskey. That's right, Whiskey. My mother was Irish but never drank at all. Now figure that out. Of course

my Mother had nothing to do with my last name. Only with my birth. She was a Catholic who was born in Belfast. She liked the name Charlie and that's the end of that story. I like to say that the British took my Mother's land while the white man took my Father's land. It's an outdated joke but it brings a laugh in the right company. Now it's your turn. How did you get your name?"

"Oh, I've always had it. I like to say that, too." She laughed and before Charlie could answer, she asked, "Charlie, what are you doing out here?"

"I'm dying. I've come here to die. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, Charlie. I believe you. Why wouldn't I believe you?"

Charlie shrugged his shoulders. He felt childish and strange because he had confessed his problem to her without hesitation. He never wanted to burden others with his illness. The last thing he wanted in his final hours was to become the subject of another person's patronization. However, and this was quite compelling in many ways, from the moment Godiva had appeared before him, Charlie had sensed a wholly compassionate, objective person, one who would not pass judgment on his situation. In this way Charlie believed his life would not suddenly collapse like a hand being pulled out of a puppet.

"G, would you believe me if I told you that I was a lesbian?"

"No, I certainly would not Mr. Whiskey. You do not appear to be a lesbian."

"Well I am a lesbian. I have been for the past eight months because all I do is dream about women."

Godiva laughed and her hair fell across her face. She pushed it away and stepped into the sunlight which highlighted her eyes. "Charlie, I'm sorry. I know that you're not lying. You don't need to tell me what's wrong. Dying is enough for any man without telling why."

"I once had a wife," Charlie said, uncertain why he was bringing it up. "And once I loved her, but she left me when I told her I was dying. I suppose that's one price we pay for living."

"Yes, it can be. We can't always name our prices, can we? Would you tell me her name?"

"May. Her name was May like the month." Charlie said, looking through

the trees to a place in the sky where there were no clouds.

“I’ve always liked that name,” Godiva said.

“Did you know that it’s Polish for bitch?” Charlie asked, before taking a drink of beer.

“Yes, I did. I’ve known that for a very long time.”

They both laughed at the same time, neither voice rising above the other.

“Gee, G, are you from around here?”

“Of course. From over there.” She pointed down the path and into the woods.

“Would you like a beer? One for the road on behalf of Charlie Whiskey?”

“Sure, but I don’t drink much. But for us I will. And I hope that you are not asking me to leave.”

“For us? No, I mean yes. I mean I’m not asking you to leave.”

“Yes, for us. I hope you like me because I like you very much.”

“G, it’s not a question of liking you,” Charlie said as he sat back down, “because from the first moment I saw you, I liked you a lot. But it’s more than that. It’s about morality. It’s about having learned over time, the difference between right and wrong. That’s another price we pay for living, too. Having to deal with what went wrong.”

“Charlie, are you a moral person? Do you feel that you have lived your life in a moral way?”

“Damn it,” Charlie said after a long drink from his new beer. “That tastes good. Now I know that’s right. Cold beer is filled with tender mercies. As for morality, I’m the most imperfect son-of-a-bitch who ever lived. But I’m trying to get better. Right up to the end, I’m trying to get better.”

“Then you and I will get along just fine.”

“We will?”

“Yes, Charlie, we will. Why don’t you stand up?”

Charlie hesitated. He looked up at Godiva and into her eyes. They would not turn away no matter how hard he wished them away. He wished and he wished and he wished but her eyes would not leave his. She was such a wonderful girl and he did not want to trouble her. Still he stood up anyway,



wondering, as his body seemed to become fluid, how much time he had left.

She surprised him by reaching out and taking his hand. Charlie smiled. Her skin was soft. It had been a long time since he had held a girl's hand. His hand was so large that it covered hers and as they stood there, her fingertips pressed into his palm. This made him blush and he wanted to look away because he could not remember the last time he had blushed. Maybe he would kiss her without asking. Maybe he would take her into his arms and simply kiss her. It felt right but he knew it would have to wait. He needed time and she made him believe that he would have all the time he needed.

“Where are we going, Godiva?” Once again it was all he could think to say. Still, the question brought him comfort. Now, Charlie was not afraid to ask her anything.

Godiva rested her head on Charlie's shoulder. She sighed and a breeze came through the trees, turning the leaves. Then she pointed down the path he hadn't noticed before. Charlie looked in that direction. Unlike the other, this path was not narrow or dark. He felt as if he had walked there many times before. Godiva snuggled closer to Charlie.

“Down there,” she whispered. “We will go down there.”

---

# Spearing Ghosts at Golgotha

Stephen R Killeen

---

Bring in the depraved angelic satyr Calvary  
Bring the devil Marines of River Styx Hell  
Bring the Golgotha shit and skulls  
Catatonia of smirking murdered Presidents  
the paranoia of priests and popes,  
stereophonic misery assembled in walls  
crawling with disease, the high TEMPLE  
of shrunken heads, believers, dupes,  
tricks, liars and deluded self-deceivers--

GOD IS DEAD!

...said an angry Christ, raising his arms  
wearily to the heavens with a pained red face  
overcome by frustration, standing on the  
Mount of Olives.

the Goddess Isis and the Nymph rejoiced equally  
Swastikas spun and cart wheeled over Bibles  
Jews ate matzah ball soup, Mohammed burped  
as the Angels fell like sober prayers unheard  
Leprechauns danced an Irish jig around  
the wretched green corpse of Saint Patrick

Eros spurted his orgasmic love to the Moon  
Luna spumed blue seas at frothing Aphrodite  
Heliogabalus unleashed Greek fire arrows at Cupid  
And Caligula defied soothsayers and senators alike  
Brother Fetish married blood Sister Lust  
in a ceremonial fuckfest, Mayan gods spying  
Lucifer enlightened and enraptured Venus  
in swift bondage under the dawn's early light  
Hades howled and laughed itself a new shade of red  
Babylon, Sodom and Palestine rose as Stars rise  
emboldened with sensational new bravado and  
brazen new courage, mania and psychotic rage.

...and every temptation, every desire, every  
vice, every carnal dream and delight, evil wish  
every Shamanic vision, every chimera, fantasy  
and every unseen hallucination became REAL.

...prudes became prostitutes and glorified whores  
as the Mistress Night smiled her Madame's approval.

...every holy memoir, hymn, religious text and  
ancient Book of the Dead burned spontaneously.

...Kings and Queens, Dictators and Emperors  
alike all fled and guillotined themselves in spite.

...terminal laws, fatal governments of fear  
and blushing gods of unbelievers all recanted.

...Freedom had new meaning--Everyone was sinless  
Anarchy was endless as the ill myth of death.

...and the Earth and Gaia continued to breathe  
despite humanity's attempts to strangle her.

...and Time continued not to exist for infinity.

---

# Returning to the Garden

Ray Blackwood

---

Oh no, I thought. He missed the fucking field goal.

I heard the first familiar crash behind me. The second came from my left. I turned on the stool and a shove knocked me to the ground. I reached for the bar and pulled myself up. Staggered backwards, desperate for a foothold. Male voices yelled, “fuck you” back and forth. A woman let out a high-pitched scream. Stuck in motion I flowed with the mass out the bar door. Flashes of black and silver.

A man’s face twisted, distorted from brass knuckles. He fell into my arms and I tried to hold him up. I felt a punch in my gut. Pushed the man away. He met the concrete face down. My cry for help was a gargle. The crowd scattered like cockroaches. Sirens and honks of emergency vehicles grew louder.

I fell to my knees, grinding teeth. The burn in my stomach shot sharp pains down my arms. I peeled my hand from the wound. The red, coagulating, mess pooled in my palm. Sweat made my skin clammy. I vomited. The breeze of finality tickled the tips of my hair and she whispered her intentions in my ear. I didn’t feel fear or regret. Surrounded, engulfed, by a stale self-reflection.

## A LIFE WORTH LEAVING

The hours at work had been long. I had listened to my boss, Roger, talk about painting the fence around his house. Forced labor from his wife. She

permitted beer while doing it. Coronas. He was unusually excited. He had hit me up about getting him some Ruffies. Mother-in-law had planned to stay at his house for a weekend. He wanted to slip one in her tea. He told me,

Ohhh, she's fucking EVIL. Bitch calls me Opie. WHAT the fuck? Tells my wife not to get another dog after we put Sam down. 'Oh my god, he masturbates. You leave that disgusting pervert, Blair. Get rid of him!' And you know what I did the WHOLE weekend she was down? I went in the garage with an 8 ball, bottle of KY, and a trash bag of porn. FUCK her.

I left the office early to unwind. I thought about poor Roger, sitting at his desk, ignoring his cell. Ordered a pitcher. Another. It took little time to put me over the edge. I had skipped the darts and focused on stiff drink.

I stumbled from the rear door of the Ebb Tide Tavern, opened the car door and sat down. After four attempts to put my key in the ignition, I locked the car and walked to the liquor store.

Malt liquor was in the back left cooler, \$2.75. The clerk looked at me with half a grin in the over-bright store and said,

Late start, taday?

Something like that. Have any small paper sacks?

He put two, still folded, into the black plastic bag. I paid in mostly quarters and went towards the park, off Pacific Drive.

At the edge of the park were 3 young kids, maybe 15 or 16-years-old. They had bikes, not racing ones, beach cruisers. They looked at me several times and pulled close to each other. I knew what they wanted. No point in being shy or making their blood pressure rise. I smiled wide and welcoming. They smiled. Two boys, tried to talk at once. One backed off. He spoke stiff, like he went to a military school,

Hello, sir. We were wondering if you could do us a big favor? You buy us a twelve pack of Natty Ice? Keep the change?

I wanted to know if he would bullshit me. Why can't you buy it, I asked. 'Scuse me, sir? I'm not 21!

His eagerness to admit he was asking me to contribute to the delinquency of a minor impressed me.

I'll buy it but one condition, I said.

Sir?

You drink what I drink, first.

The boys took little time in agreeing. I told them to follow me to the handball court. We sat in the shade behind the painted blue, cement wall. It was spotted with tiny smudges of blue and red rubber, from where balls impacted.

I took one beer from my bag and handed it to one of the boys. I handed another an empty paper sack. Leading by example, my beer went in the paper bag. I folded the tops down an inch, leaving only the narrow cap exposed. I explained:

Twist the top of the paper bag around the beer like this. Get it tight, though. Don't rip the bottom. Wipe the condensation off, it'll soak the paper and the bottom'll rip. After we drink these, I'll get you another. I'm gonna drink another.

Three young boys, not so innocent, but not deviants, either, got trashed on one 40-ounce beer. One puked, but thanked me all the same. I left them after they told me I was the coolest drunk they ever met.

I went to a liquor store farther inland. The same beer was 25 cents cheaper. When the clerk rang up two, he over charged me 50 cents. I didn't argue. I asked him what kind of vodka he sold. He turned. I put a Snickers bar, the small size, in my pocket to make up the difference.

You have any paper sacks, I asked. He handed me one and I left.

### DOMESTIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Face down on the olive green carpet. Front door, wide open. Sun, bright outside. A child yelled "mom" in the distance. I got up and wrapped a towel around my waist. Shut the back door. 40-ounce malt liquor bottle almost empty, sat in the middle of a musty smelling stain in the carpet. I picked it up and drank the jejune juice. Warm. Flat. Carpet hair instead of foam.

The booms at the front door could only be the police. I opened it cautiously. There stood the building manager. Would I have preferred the police? My head pounded and alcohol seeped from my pores.

She was short with awkwardly small feet. Walked with a limp. Pudgy. Hair like greasy red wires. Shirts stained with baby goo. I nicknamed her Troll Doll. The single mother had been sneaking into my apartment and pinching buds from my weed jar since I moved in. I had been overlooking that until she bamboozled me into babysitting.

That happened one Saturday, three months into my lease. I went to the pool, drunk from NCAA football. Battled a Big Gulp filled with the champagne of beers. Her kid played around the pool. She was five and I was concerned. Troll Doll watched from the Manager's Office. A Hungarian couple in their mid-30's came in. She yelled to me as she locked the office door. She had to show the property and to watch Sonia. I had no time to rebut. Her attention was on the fresh fish. I chugged the beer, petrified. Children shit, and drown.

She wandered back later than I anticipated. Beer was gone. My hands and feet were prunes. I had to piss. She thanked me and picked Sonia up. I pissed in the pool cursing her name. I adopted a policy of avoidance. Did a good job until she showed up at my door.

Why was Troll Doll there? Which snooping front would she use? I opened the door wide and smiled wider. She said,

Hey, I just wanted to tell you my family is going to be staying with me for a couple days, so if you see strangers around it's ok.

I sniffed the air. Foul stench of sweat, alcohol, and stale weed. Could she smell the weed? I could. I looked about the living room for the bong. Was it sitting out for any guest to see?

Alright, I said.

Yeah, did you see my sister, she continued. She saw you when she came up. She totally thinks you're hot. She told me. She's like sixteen, but she's mature.

Thank you, I said, and shut the door.



I went in the bathroom carrying a plastic CD case. Opened the top drawer and pulled out an Altoid box. I poured the powder on the case and took a dollar bill from my wallet. Twisted it into a tight tube. The line was as thick as a cigarette and took both nostrils to get it all. It burned, but not like it had done in the past.

It took a few weeks for the police to show up.

### NOTICE OF FLIGHT

Two young officers of law enforcement approached me as I stood in swim trunks on the back patio. I was looking for my lighter. They came from the back of the complex and took me by surprise. The blonde said,

Have you been to the pool today?

No, I said. Nice day, though. I should. Have you been there?

We got a call. A naked, drunk, white male was in the pool. Were you in the pool earlier today? The dark haired officer said.

No, I wasn't. I'm gonna go later. A naked male, huh? Well, I'll tell you what, if I see one, you'll be the first I call. I don't want to see that kinda stuff, officers.

They turned and walked towards the front gate, knowing damn well, but not able to prove it. I waited until they were about 20 feet away and asked,

If you were just at the pool, did you happen to see an orange lighter?

They continued walking, ignoring me. The required booking paperwork for a skinny-dipping, white male, must be handsome. Never again, at 2 in the afternoon, I thought.

As they walk through the complex gate, a knock at the front door. My houseguest, a 5 foot 4 bald man as dark as Wesley Snipes, answered the door. He wore tight jeans cut off at the knees. Ends frayed. His shirt was an extra small Abercrombie v-neck. Purple. Diamond studded earrings. Clean man.

He yelled for me and dismissed himself to the couch. I hesitated but

relieved him. Troll Doll. She stood in the doorway with a disgusted look on her face. She gave me 30 days to vacate, calling me a sick faggot and adding,

You BETTER not burn the fucking place down. Smoking WEED in there with your little BUTT buddy.

I asked her if she was done. She pushed farther in. She pointed at me and without any heavy overtones said,

I have a daughter. This is a family place. You do not belong here.

Jacque slumped in the couch. Head cocked sideways.

Who's cooking fish? he said.

Troll Doll directed her breath at Jacque and said,

You're going to hell for what you're doing. I'll pray for you.

She looked at me. I'm keeping your deposit.

I shut the door and sat on the couch. I apologized to Jacque. He told me I was right about her being a cunt. He put his feet on the coffee table. Toe nails shiny with clear polish.

I pulled black trash bags from under the sink. Opened the top drawer of my desk. Sticky pads. Pens. Pencils. Old bank statements. I emptied everything into the bag and walked in the vanity.

Next to the sink were scented candles in jars. I picked up a bottle of coconut butter lotion and put it in the bag. Natural hand soap made with *real* oatmeal. Condoms. Into the bag. Jacque helped me move the couch to the sidewalk. Someone would take it. I loaded my car with clothes and large Tupperware boxes. Boxes went into storage. The car just went away. I sent my boss Roger Peremptovski an email:

*Dear Sirs,*

*It is with a heavy heart I am forced to send you this email regarding my employment with Guilov, Guilov & Peremptovski. After a recent medical examination, I learned that I suffer from a disease that has been becoming ever more common in society through recent decades.*

*It seems I was exposed to a prick years ago that has been*

*causing my morals to shift. My doctor said that as the prick mutated, my DNA slowly altered. It took time, of course, but I evolved into a prick myself.*

*My diagnosis requires I adhere to a strict regiment of treatments that include drug induced sexual prowess and extended periods of deep sedation. Only experimental medications are available for this disease so I will be forced to find the proper dosages, personally, leaving me at risk of mind expansion and free will.*

*My rehabilitation also requires abstinence from the prick, so I must tender my resignation, effective immediately. I can no longer hold a genuine posture in the industry of my current employ. I apologize, some, for any inconvenience this may cause. Should you need clarification of my condition, please feel free to go fuck yourself at any time.*

## IN THE BEGINNING

I wiped my hand across my mouth after spitting on the cement trail. Beard was getting thick. I squatted, and studied my encampment. Fresh, smoggy air.

I had found the place years before, while driving to work. I saw it from the freeway interchange. A meadow of grass next to a dried drainage canal joggers used as a trail. The grass area wasn't huge, half a block in a triangle shape. Others were there before me.

I didn't sleep the first night. After a few weeks I had met everyone living there and got to know my neighbors well, enough. Several families had children. I stayed away from them. Seeing kids in stained clothing upset me.

Conversations with the socially acceptable people became non-existent. I no longer connected with them. No spiritual, primeval, interactivity. One reality split by two perceptions. Dusk, dawn. Left, right. Here, there.

I shared a stove and fire pit with a young couple. The man was 19 and they said she was 18. I thought the girl looked 15 and he, 25. Her belly was about to explode, but he helped her sit, stand, and walk. They watched my tent and belongings when I was away.

The girl, Marie, took my cell phone on the occasions she stayed with her family. Her and Joe couldn't go long without talking to each other. I worried she would need him in an emergency. He wasn't welcome at her parents'. She had a Roman Catholic stepfather who hated him. She charged the phone and helped with the bill.

Next to the young couple was Craig. He was an ex-con who stayed there because it was the only place left for him. At the age of 15 he went to jail for pulling a pocketknife on a teacher. He never looked back. Mostly violent crimes. Some felonies. Bastard son of an alcoholic, he called himself.

### **BORN AWAKE**

I was on the 17 bus headed inland when the crash happened. A white van with "Al Heim Carpet Cleaner" written on it hit the back of the bus. Never used its brakes they told me. I traveled the sidewalk. The next bus would take 20 minutes.

I saw a pleasant looking side street, lined with beautiful willow trees that draped over the cement pavement. Looked like a neighborhood in an old black and white movie. It was peaceful. I walked down the center of the road. No one on their porch to stare.

The street ended into a quant park. I had grown up on a street with a park like it. In the far corner was a shelter put together with branches and tarp. It was next to a picnic bench. An old hippy danced on top. I went to him.

He wore a bandana around his head like a headband. Thinning gray hair in a wavy ponytail. Short Jesus beard. His shirt was pink. The sleeves and half the bottom were cut off. Levis cut into shorts so high the pockets hung from

the bottoms. Top button undone and a dirty, hairy, hanging belly, protruded over. Construction boots and white, striped socks with worn elastic. They hung over his boots. A pair of Carl's Jr., happy meal sunglasses was his only accessory.

I introduced myself and he came down from the table. He said he did construction work, under the table. I asked him how he came to be here. He rubbed his hands and said,

Well, when traveling a road and you don't necessarily know why you are traveling on that particular road, you begin to see other roads. Get my point?

No, I said.

Look- there's two sides to everything. But these concepts we symbolize with the words right and wrong, have been misclassified, my man. There is no right or wrong in the sense of decision making. Life altering event, my ass. You wanted it! Right or wrong is the result of a math equation.

How so, I said.

I believe in compassion or consequence. Separation of paths. The end is the same. You get there through compassion or through consequence. Leave the Buddha out of this.

He rubbed his chin and paused for a minute before continuing,

I followed The Dead for my whole life. Till Jerry Bear died. Some shifted. Started following Phish. Dead Head to Phish Head. Aint that a bitch? But when Phish comes around, my friends stop in and give me a ton of drops. To help support me, ya know.

Sure. I said.

I followed him into his home. I was surprised how well built it was. From the outside it looked like art deco in garbage, but from inside, a splendid man made cave. All the branches were roped together, tight. The tarp was secure and at a slight angle for drainage. It was 4 foot tall on the inside. I could walk around on my knees. Dirt packed hard and slanting outboard. He said he had been there months and no one messed with him.

We talked about the drugs we had done. The parties we had been to. The women we said we slept with, even though those stories never happened. He

took a Visine bottle from a cigar box. How do you want it, he said.

What?

In the eyes? On the tongue?

What?

These kids couldn't take that. You kidding? he said. Here, I have sugar cubes.

He picked one out of the yellow box and held it up between his thumb and index finger by the corners like a fine diamond. He dropped the liquid circumspectly on each side. He gave it to me and I put it in my mouth. He did the same.

We ran around the park like primitive primates. Faces painted with mud. We spotted a raccoon and named him God. We tried to catch him but he would not be caught. I drank fresh orange juice the man made by the cup full. He said the vitamin C would enhance the visuals.

I went in the coed bathroom to piss. Unzipped and began. The toilet shook and dropped through the floor. I stopped and rubbed my eyes. The toilet was there. I started again. It fell through the ground a second time. I took this as a sign. It was better to piss in the bushes. I did so next to the bathrooms.

We crawled along a storm drain on the far end of the park. Secluded. We lay on our backs and smoked weed looking at the clouds. I saw monkeys fighting over a hand puppet with a big square nose. We crawled back out.

At the west end of the park was a thick plot of trees. We scrawled our names and pictures of God in the bark. I saw a dead bird being taken back into the Earth. A swarm of ants frenzied to carry him, in pieces, to the boat captain. The captain of the boat that would take him across the river to the underworld. I reached in my pocket. Pulled out a quarter and laid in on his head. The ants scattered from under the coin.

We returned to the old man's house. I felt reality slipping back into focus. I walked to the water fountain to soak my head. When I returned, the old man disappeared. It was my time to leave.

I hopped on the bus and closed my eyes. My skin was covered in oily

soot and quivered in bursts. I felt like a piece of bacon, just taken out of the pan. Every muscle was weak like I just walked home from the moon. All eyes were fixed on me. I couldn't wait to take a shower in the Del Taco sink.

I sat under a tree next to my camp. The shower renewed. Craig walked over to me. He sniffed and said,

Hey man. You got avocados? I'm tryin to make some guac, man. I don't got any avocados. Three apples for one avocado?

Sorry, bud. I don't have any.

Ok, man. No worries. Ah, you don't know. Did I tell you the latest?

Oh, shit. With? Legal, parental, classes?

All fuckin three, man. you know Jody got the kid? She does. I aint seen him in 6 fuckin months. She tries to keep him from me, man. She tells him I'm all this shit. I ain't been around. Hell no, I haven't been around. How can I? the fuckin state's had me in a little cell. Privatized prisons collecting money off my ass. Talk to them assholes. Why I don't pay child support. I can's stay out the shit for more than ten months. If I'm lucky. You know that. She knows that. I been here six months and I ain't been fucked with once. I can't leave, ya know. She don't get it.

Craig, I said. He's seven. Do you want him to go to school lying about where his daddy lives? I'd be a ghost until he's 18 if I was in your position. I'm not a father. You love your son.

Shit, yeah. I love my son. I ain't always been there and his mom, I owe her. It's totally me. All my fault. I can't lie. I'm a man

I agreed he was a man. If it weren't for Craig, I would have given up before things had gotten comfortable. I told him to get some nice clothes and take his son out. To which he said,

I have a suit I use for job interviews. My brother gave it to me. But, that's another fuckin thing, man. He wants to go with me to Friday's class. I have 15 months to go and he want to check up on me. Like I've been fuckin off the classes. Just wants to meet my friends. They ain't my friends. He knows that.

I thought he was "institutionalized" from the amount of time he had spent behind bars and plated glass. Paranoid. Not with voices, but concepts.

Theories of governmental conspiracy. The poisoned water supplies. Corporate manipulation of labor. Forced to work to live. Scientifically enhanced food. Hormones that produced more milk. Religious thievery. Salvation was a fee. I said,

Bring him with you. It'll look good to the Anger Management people. You always bitch about how angry he makes you. Bring him and be cool. Points, my man.

You're right, he said. I gotta find some avocados and feed Mustard. Mutt's lookin as homeless as me.

## VISION

I waited 20 minutes for the 17 bus when I went to see the old man. He stood at end of the street waiting for me when I arrived. We walked together, down the street lined with willow trees.

We went in his house and smoked weed. We talked about the media and he gave me a book by Noam Chomsky. I flipped through his copy of *The Anarchist Cookbook* filled with underlines and notes. He offered it but I respectfully declined. I asked him why he lives this way. He said,

I don't believe in hierarchical domination, son. In any form. This is how life turns out when you 'stick to your guns,' as Emma Goldman said. My daughter does as she pleases. I never gave her bullshit rules. They mean nothing. Nature gives you all the rules you need. She turned out fine. I treated her like my responsibility, not my possession, son. Her mother, quote, "grew up". He held both hands in the air with the index and middle fingers extended. His head slumped and he continued,

Wanted me to do the same. I am grown, I told her. She started drinkin. Kicked me out. My daughter turned out just fine.

The old man changed the subject. He said life was a magic trick. He explained the complexities of illusion. I was a student of the underworld. Mesmerized by the spiritualistic teachings of a modern stoic. Shaman. Guru.



Do you want something better than acid, he said. I questioned what he was referring to. I was more than interested.

Ok, he started. Sit in the lotus. Or as close to it as you can. I have a pipe here that I got from a drunk Indian back east. He said it was a family heirloom or some damn thing. Gives you visions if the ceremony is done right. At the right time. Smoking the right shit, too I suppose.

Does it work? I said. Have you tired it?

Yeah. I've tried it. He paused and stared at the old wooden pipe. The bowl was deep and the stem about 18 inches long. Leather straps were wrapped around the stem and bowl, where they fit together. The end of the strap looked like it had been snapped. Maybe feathers were connected there.

It works, I think. He said. I've had quite a few visions over the years. Because of the pipe? I don't know. Doesn't matter. It's an illusion anyway, son. We'll smoke some strong Indica. Take a rest. Maybe you'll have a vision. Maybe you will just wake up refreshed.

We sat opposite of each other and passed the pipe. The heavy high took my body. I stared at the wall. Stoned from weed. He didn't talk. I couldn't talk. My head was 20 pounds and eyelids closed on their own. I fought to open them.

They sprang open. The world was a bright painting. A beautiful, Monet of rich, solid colors. I felt there were puppet strings attached to my wrists and ankles. The man was a brilliant mannequin. Dressed in a toga and holding a golf club. A 3 wood.

I watched the bugs. They were all fucking. The man took my hand and told me to follow. On our feet but crouching, he pulled aside the brick wall that seconded for a supporting beam and sidewall for his home. We stepped into the dark together.

We walked down a crystal pathway with cartoon houses on both sides. Cartoons like a child would draw. The sun was a yellow circle with jagged rays and a wire. Voices were deep and slow like a record playing at the wrong speed.

Follow me, he said. Don't be scared.

I am scared.

It's okay, though. I have to show you something. He gripped my hand tighter.

We came to a clearing. A meadow of multicolored squares of carpet. The dolls from *It's a Small World* were fucking with their clothes still on. Male and male, female and female, female and male. White, black, brown. Missionary, doggy, cowboy. No pattern.

He led me into a cottage. Inside a panda bear wearing war medals sat on a chair shaped like a tear. A kangaroo massaged the panda's head and whispered in his ear. A bird flew over us and pooped on my shoulder. Thick crickets in swimsuits ran around the ground frantically.

A group of ants formed in the corner and started a baseball game, complete with tiny firework show for homeruns. The spectator ants did the wave. I thought about salty peanuts.

Three sharks with handlebar mustaches swam by in air. They wore berets, like French artists. They painted on the wall, a scene of a baby lion in a reed basket floating down a river towards a young girl bathing.

And jasmine. The trip was filled with the scent of jasmine. I took deep breaths and held it with my eyes closed. The man put his hand on my shoulder and whispered it was time to leave.

When I opened my eyes I was sitting cross-legged in the shack cave. The man was gone. I walked back to the bus and traveled home in a clouded daze.

## LAST LAUGH

I woke as the wind rustled my tent. I unzipped it. Looked out with suspicion. Joe and Marie were gone. Craig was gone. I walked out to the fire pit and sat on a rock. Two young girls played on the opposite side of the camp. They were in the dried, cement riverbed. Drawing pictures with chalk.

I said hello for the first time as I walked past them. They looked at me. Said hello back. I continued to the bus stop, asking for change along the way.

I boarded the bus to see the man. Got off at the same stop. I walked the willow tree path and entered the park. I was anxious to talk to him about that last trip. It was more intense and real than acid ever was.

His home was gone. I looked around the park. All his things were in a dumpster in the back. The tarp. Branches. Ragged blankets. Did he get arrested? Did he go on a trip he couldn't return from? He talked about staying mobile and the security in it. Maybe Phish was in town. I thought about that.

I walked back to the bus with my head low. I came by a dental office. They were closed. There was a flowerbed with roses in front. I picked several of different colors and smelled them. I took them in deep.

At the bus stop, a woman with her sleeping baby in her arms stood next to the sign. An old woman with a plastic, wrinkled face sat and stared at the traffic. I handed each a rose. They smile and said gracias.

When I got home, my cell phone sat on the ground where Marie had returned it. It beeped. I picked it up and flipped it open. Ten dollars dropped out. Screen said 1 text message. I pressed the green button. It was from my mother. Read it and deleted. Five missed calls and 3 new voice mails. Most from my ex boss Roger. I was a disgrace. Degenerate.

I walked to the mini mart for an ice cream. Paying for the strawberry shortcake on a frozen stick, I got another beep for an incoming text. I ignored it. It rang as I crossed the bridge that stretched over our neighborhood.

I stopped and looked over the canal. Cement. I looked up. Cement. What a shame I thought, and took off my sandals to walk the rest of the way barefoot. I studied the cell phone for some time. Something else I didn't understand. Why a necessity for instantaneous communication? What has to be said now? Is there no longer concern for solitude? Phone rang.

Call grandma, she's lonely! I shouted and threw the phone from the bridge. I watched it arch towards its demise into the cement gallows, below. It blew apart in every direction making a "crack" sound on impact.

I walked home half singing, half humming,

I've got to run to keep from hidin... humm... humm... And I've gone by the point of carin... humm... humm...

## RESEEDING THE GARDEN

I cleaned up my yard and tidied up the house. Thought about the old man. A middle-aged gentleman from the far end of the meadow approached me. The young couple was quiet in their home. I met the man before, but he introduced himself again. He told me he had spoken to Craig.

So why are you here, he said.

Not sure what you mean.

Well, Craig told me you have a bunch of degrees or something.

I do. And smiled.

Why are you here? Is this some anthropologic study for you? This is our lives, here. You know, some don't have a choice.

I don't have a choice, either.

I don't mean to sound rude but there's a difference between being broke and being poor, as well. Are you broke and hanging around until your luck changes?

I said, I am poor. But by design. My means, I choose not to see.

I have kids. I don't need drugs around here. Smoking pot is one thing but we can't have no junkies here.

Drugs are a necessity of human existence. Shaman is instinctual. Drugs put you in that meditation. For those that don't know how else to get there. You will not have any drug drama with me.

He sat down and we talked. We shook hands at the end of the conversation. He told me about his daughters. The older one was mentally handicapped and the other was having trouble in school. Not with her work. Her attitude. I agreed to meet with them. A few days later I did. She was still in a lot of trouble.

A boy at school called her a dirty prostitute. She slashed him with the mirror of a broken compact she carried. The police arrested the twelve year old. She spent 8 days in juvenile hall. I offered to buy her concert tickets if she didn't get in trouble the rest of the school year. Had never been to a punk rock show. She accomplished that.

I interested her in leaving home. Gave her *On The Road* from Kerouac. She ate it up. I gave her the *Invisible Man* from Ellison. We met every few weeks and every week during the summers. I mostly added to her existing studies. It kept her busy. Out of trouble. Genius girl.

The summer before her senior year, she disappeared. She left a note she was going to Germany. She returned at the end of summer. She had been in San Francisco. She met a boy and they were together. Took clown lessons from a school, there. She was safe. Excited about the world.

On the day she graduated high school, I went with the family to dinner. They had moved from the meadow many years before. The dinner was at a fancy steak house. I wore new clothes. I ate an inch thick steak and baked potato with sour cream.

She had gotten into Columbia. Planned on law school in San Francisco. I gave her a framed silhouette of Bob Marley, done with spray paint. I had gotten it in San Francisco when I was in college. Retrieving it from my mother's house required making an amends. I did so.

At the end of the night, we talked about the logic of man.

Self-preservation mechanism has created a divide in humanity. Smart and dumb. She said. Darwin. Evolution. Survival of the fittest. The stronger, more perfected genes, like yours, will survive. Why don't you have kids?

Because I have more perfected genes, I said.

And why is it you've never voted? The ancient Greeks would call you idiots. So you're an idiot.

Thank you. I think. I am a poet. Not only do we make terrible leaders, Plato, we find the defaults of people. I can never find something good enough to vote for.

We continued for some time. When it was time to part, she cried. We hugged good night. I was too scared to cry.

### INCOMPLETE SENTENCE

They dropped me off around 8 and I decided to walk over to the bar and celebrate my personal accomplishment. The bar was crowded when I walked in. There was a seat at the bar, just about in the center. The Raiders were playing on the big screen at the back. A group of guys with baldheads and Raiders jerseys were excited over every play. I turned towards the bar and listened. I didn't want to accidentally make eye contact with any athletic fundamentalists. I kept my back to them.

I heard there was twenty seconds to go in the game. Raiders were down by a field goal. They returned a punt from their own 11 and ran back to the opposite 40.

Fourth down came and Raiders set up for a field goal. This was a 55-yard attempt. Kicker's record was 52. The men gathered in tight and waited in anticipation.

If they score, they tie and go into overtime.

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# The Stillness Distance of the Stars

Eric Halliwell

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Don't reject a strawman God,  
reject the lump in your throat  
when angels whisper love in your ear.

Reject the wind in your face  
yes from the ocean's tall tale of tears  
full of the salt of your earth.

Reject the test of honest favor,  
your own savor, reject  
your own ore smelted

in your mother's arms,  
reject the stillness distance  
of the stars

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# One of Those Simultaneous Dichotomies

Eric Halliwell

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I don't know the sorrow  
of the ambient light perhaps  
where yellow gets infused like flames are  
in the autumn leaves

they burn you brandishing  
your soul and you cry  
and you're not sure why  
it's one of those simultaneous dichotomies



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# The Great Symbolism of Electricity

Eric Halliwell

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It's a nice feeling  
being in charge, like  
one of those particles.

Yes, the metaphysical  
analogue,  
the great symbolism of electricity.

The angels have two polar wings  
and lightning is mere metaphor  
for a symptom of that;

and yet our hearts are divine  
instruments, cunning little  
lightning rod transformers,

making safe the conduction  
of large quantities  
of God.

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## Worship

Thomas Fuchs

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The gym had become my church. Sweat was my incense; the rhythmic clank of metal, my prayer. But would my prayer get me the one I wanted? Would he notice me, come with me?



At my place, I knelt before him, supplicating by sucking him, summoning his power, then changed position, face down near the floor, my ass up high and open.

He stepped around behind me, out of my line of sight and thus invisible to me, but present all the same – is this not a godlike attribute? Gently but firmly, the complete master of me, he entered, the moment of pain marking the passage into, yes, a kind of Heaven. Over time, this experience got better and better.



After we'd been doing it long enough that we'd gotten to know each other, Alex began to tease me sometimes. He still does. Once I was sucking him off and when he unloaded, I told him I worshipped his cum. He dipped his finger in his thick white crème, touched it to my forehead and said, "Bless

you, my son.”

But I know that even though he rarely admits it, he takes my ideas about this seriously, has them on his mind. One time, not so long ago he shouted out. “We’re animals, animals, animals!” as he slammed himself into me. And at this, the very moment that he was arguing the proposition that we are nothing more than flesh without spirit, he was hurling me into that pure state where boundaries of time and space are obliterated, as close to a sense of eternity as we come to on earth, surely the equal of anything ever achieved by the most disciplined of meditating mystics.



Sometimes, he is far from me. This weekend he has driven to Chicago, for the funeral of an Aunt he barely knew. I didn’t want to go with him. All his relatives are Protestants of some kind. Thin Protestants, I call them, their religion vague, their rituals without any passion or much comfort. Religion is a compartment of their lives, reserved for ceremonial occasions such as weddings and funerals. I want to ask people like this, who do you cry out to in the middle of the night, when the darkness closing in is darker than the night?



So, a lonely Saturday. House cleaning with the television on for company. Some documentary plodding on about archeology and then a startling image catches my eye. A statue has been recovered from an ancient Greek wreck and is being winched to the surface. It’s an enormous find, almost completely intact -- a young athlete. It captures me, my attention riveted as it ascends through the shimmering blue green water, then bursts free and is silhouetted against the blazing Aegean sky. The seawater streams from it. As it is swung

aboard ship, the water, reduced to beads and small rivulets, looks much as sweat must have on the golden flesh of the young athlete on whom this masterpiece was modeled twenty five centuries ago. The years have taken some toll, camera close-ups revealing erosion and pitting. But the idea of it remains, the overall lines, the intentions of the sculptor, the love behind it, the adoration, the worship of youthful strength.



Sunday brunch with friends who have been to a church service. They're going on about what a great experience it was, not too subtly suggesting, and not for the first time, that Alex and I ought to join them some Sunday. "Needless to say, it's gay-friendly," says one of these idiots.

Suddenly it is all very clear to me, the thoughts fully formed, the words ready to go. I say, "No, it's not gay-friendly."

"It is."

"Either your pastor is kidding himself or he's bullshitting you, cause if it's Christian, or Jewish or Islamic, for that matter, it's not gay-friendly."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"None of those religions are too crazy about straight sex, either. Original sin. Does that ring a bell? Humans lived in Paradise until they learned that this part goes into that part."

One of the fools asks, "Are you going to start ranting?" One of the others says, "He already is, in case you haven't noticed."

"Look," I say, "I've written all these damn History Channel shows and I've noticed that whether you're looking at native Americans or old Japan or China or Tahiti or anyplace, sex is pretty much accepted as part of the way things are and ought to be, and there isn't usually much or any kind of a taboo about gay sex. But, bang, as soon as the Western tide hits, sex is shoved into the dark"

"The West? I don't understand," says one of the bimbos.

“The West. What’s laughingly called Western Civilization.”

At least one of these guys has been following all this, despite the pitcher of Mimosa going around the table. He says, “Wait a minute, wait a minute. You said Islam in addition to Christians and Jews. Islam isn’t Western. Also, there are lots of gay friendly Christian and Jewish churches, synagogues, whatever. And maybe Islamic for all I know.”

“In response to your first point, Christians and Moslems both regard the Jewish Bible as holy writ and...”

I continue to be astounded by how profoundly ignorant so many people are. Someone interrupts by asking, “The Jews have a Bible?”

As patiently as I can, trying not to sound condescending, I say, “Yes, the Jews have a Bible. You probably know it better as the Old Testament.”

“Oh.”

“And in answer to the second point, if you read that old book, you’ll see that gay-friendly preachers, rabbis, imams, etcetera, to the degree they’re gay-friendly, they are going against some pretty specific denunciations of what we like so very much to do. The Old Testament is anti-sex, pretty much anti-woman, and very much anti-gay. It’s all this crazy one God stuff. The Jews did a terrible thing when they invented monotheism.”

“You’re blaming the Jews? Are you anti-Semitic or something?”

“Of course not, but look, other religions. The ancient Greeks, the Romans, most of the non-Bible religions in the world, worship many gods, god of water, god of the sky, god or goddess of this and that, including gods of cock and clit, gods of fertility, gods of erections. Then the Jews came up with one God, and He is a jealous God. ‘Thou shalt have no other gods.’ So He has to demean and condemn all rivals, all the other gods, which really means all the natural forces of the universe. Including sex. Fuckig is still allowed because God needs more babies to worship him, but sex for the sheer joy of it, straight or gay, that’s a no-no.”

The waiter comes around for coffee refills. Someone says, “No more caffeine for him.”

The waiter says, “I couldn’t help overhearing, boys. Are you saying that

when you're having sex, that's a kind of religion?"

"Yep, I guess I am."

"Well," says the waiter, "Gimme that old time religion."



Late afternoon, twilight closing in. His car coming up the driveway. Two decades together and I'm still excited by the prospect of seeing him again.

Watching him get out of the car, shouldering his bag, starting up toward the house.

Like that statue pulled from the ocean bottom, he's not what he once was. Who is? Not me for sure – but the spirit of which the flesh is only a manifestation still burns bright.

He comes through the back door, into the kitchen, drops the bag on to the floor, comes to me. The faithful are rewarded. Clothes come off. Services commence.

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# Ode to Masturbation

Ocean Vuong

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Pearled semen trickles from vessel.  
The silence of possibilities dries  
on the floor and inside my palm.

Even now, as the body trembles  
from the pleasure of its making,  
somewhere, a plane  
is pregnant with death.

When starlight sparkles  
on the surface of falling bombs  
and flames turn muscle  
into pompous, skin into ash,

the sound of a scream in mid-death,  
straining to push the weight  
of last words, can you blame the hand  
for craving the softest parts?

Reach down, there is music  
in the body, play yourself  
like a lyre, insert the finger  
into sanctum, feel  
the quivering of crevices, skin  
palpitating ripples as if stretched  
over drumbeats.

Reach down. Let explosions be muted  
by climaxes, the Holy Water  
between your thighs flow  
into rivulets of cleansing,  
let it rinse the soil of drying blood.  
Reach down, there is music  
in the cunt, the cock,  
the asshole. Grab your balls—  
that grenade of white flowers.

Reach down as fathers destroy the sons  
and daughters of other fathers,  
as faces emerge from wombs  
and exiled into memory.  
Reach down as a thousand I love you's  
fail to reach the man caressing  
the trigger's black tongue.

Because even now, in a city shimmering  
from shards of broken halos,  
we are not holy, only beautiful.  
Because even now as I kneel to wipe  
this cooling pool of sperm,



down the hall—a man  
is beating madness into a child's skull,  
and not once will I ask  
my unborn children  
to forgive  
                    this hand.

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## Live Nation

Ocean Vuong

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*Nocturne of a concert in Prospect Park, Brooklyn*

The crowd is a mashed mouth.  
We are in it, chewed  
in undulations  
of sweat and flesh.

We have come to forget  
the body, to be vessels  
infused with drumbeats.

.  
We have come from restrooms  
where we breathed  
a thousand white gods  
into the heart's inkwell.

From playgrounds strewn  
with plastic bags, the shadows  
of childhood. Alone, we trembled  
in suburbia's impossible silence.

We have crawled from the bridge  
where our feet resisted the freedom

of flight, where we sat instead,  
watching the sunrise, dreaming  
of each other's skin disrobed.

We are the roses that bloom  
from knife wounds,  
too young to fight  
what we cannot name,  
our cheeks still burning  
from the backhands  
of broken fathers.

We are virgin orphans  
itching for the music of wet lips,  
the touch of ecstatic hands,  
a cock or two to brush  
the edges of our souls.

The crowd is a mashed mouth  
and we are in it—dancing  
this prodigal dance.

We dance until the band fades  
into silhouettes of smoke  
and the city returns  
in her dress of morning ash.

Above, a canopy of trees  
fracture with light  
as grass-tips reach skyward  
their emerald flames.

A man on a bench  
unravels a cracked violin  
and begins to stroke  
the saddest note.

Our heads lifted  
from pillows of warm vomit  
and a wafer of dawn  
melting on our tongues,

tell me, what to regret  
of surrender  
when we have come this close  
to divinity  
and not crumble?



*National Gallery, Washington D.C., September, 2010, Sven Davisson*

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# Remind Me

Sven Davisson

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Visiting Allen Ginsberg's Beat snapshots  
at the National Gallery of Art  
an unanticipated sadness  
black crows circle out of mind  
grainy blackandwhite ghosts  
of my own childhood  
the skeleton of time  
reminds me  
hours spent discussing  
Shelley's 'Ode to the Westwind'  
as breath machine  
Ozymandias and impermanence

*Remind me*

*when we meet again*

and now years later

here we are

fading snapshots

behind glass

the mundane and casual

archived and labeled

national memory

occluding personal ones

*Remind me*

how handsome Peter was  
dead now just three months  
as I move through the galleries  
images set out in chronological order  
I note how many lives are end dated  
take note of the rare few that are not  
reflecting on life impermanent as the  
chemicals that form the emulsions  
fading minutely before me

*Remind me*

the second day of Ango  
an image of Gary Snyder  
catches my eye  
and makes me smile  
young thin unexpectedly handsome  
Unsui's koromo with rakusu  
standing in his garden  
Kyoto, July 1963

*Remind me*

the grey in your beard  
as you lit a cigarette  
beneath a NO SMOKING sign  
answering a student question  
quoting Trungpa  
on enlightenment  
the step that isn't there  
my own mental snapshots  
turning to grey  
and beginning to fade

*Remind me*

your words  
written on the back  
of a postcard  
an arial view of Nashville  
postmark new york  
the same hand beneath  
each of these images

the next morning  
sitting in meditation  
thoughts fighting back  
pulling me toward poetry  
rebellling with a cascade of words  
that have not come in months

*Remind me*

*when next we meet  
whether it be in Maine  
at Naropa  
or somewhere on the moon*

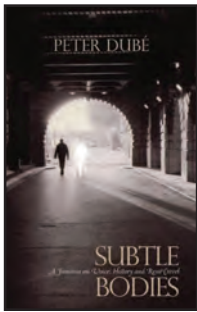


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## Reviews

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**Subtle Bodies.** Peter Dubé  
(Lethe Press, 2010, 106pp, \$13.00)



It is Paris, 1935, and the Surrealist writer Rene Crevel has turned on the gas stove in his apartment. As death fills the rooms, Crevel dwells on past events that changed his life and ended the peace among the Surrealists. Years earlier, Crevel enacted seances for Andre Breton and his guests. At first, these performances were fraudulent, but soon Crevel found himself overcome with lapses in memory and time. Portents made during the seances came to pass as Breton's friends fell under a morbid influence. While in a trance, Crevel felt his sense of self expand to new levels, subtle bodies of consciousness. Beings he named "Interlocuters" began to whisper to him of other worlds, other times. What at first feels like a revelation soon brings Crevel to the depths of despair. In this fantastical biography of Crevel, accomplished Canadian author Peter Dube, explores the famed writer's desires of flesh and verse and experience.

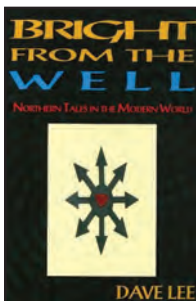
In a style as delicate, layered and cerebral as Crevel's own, Dubé imagines the author's life into existence in a work whose brevity and complexity echo those of its subject. Crevel was a figure between worlds, occupying interstitial spaces between ideologies, philosophies and currents of his place and time. He was a communist among surrealists and a surrealist among communists.

His sexuality was abiguous, while being a close friend and collaborater with the reflexively anti-homosexual leader of the Surrealists Andre Breton. Dubé uses the fantastical mediumistic ‘channelings’ to mirror this de-seating of reality to great effect.

A fiction centered on the life of an actual historical figure can be a difficult terrain. Dubé is an incredibly talented author whose peronal literary and artisitic interests make him ideally suited to navigate the shoals of imagining a fictionalized Crevel. “I wouldn’t want anyone to read *Subtle Bodies* as a representative or reliable biography,” states Dube in a recent interview with *Out In Print*, “because it’s not one. Some of the events and the basic timeline are reasonably close to Crevel’s actual life but many things are simply made up. I wrote a fiction about his life, in order to explore things I was interested in: how life and art overlap, for example, the inner drive to pursue vision and the ramifications of that drive, the dynamics of friendship... a whole bunch of stuff that isn’t biographical data about Crevel the man, but that struck me as valuable in terms of looking at what goes into making the narrative of a life.”

As with Crevel’s own *Mon Corps et moi* (*My Body and I*, the reader becomes an intimate confidant of the conflicted writer as he navigates between the conflixtions of his worlds. Dubé uses his imagined Crevel to explore evocatively the tensions between mind, body and spirit; social dictums and sexual desire; the mundane and the imagined.

**Bright from The Well: Northern Tales in the Modern World**, Dave Lee  
(Mandrake, 2008, 168pp, \$23.00)



*Bright from The Well* is the latest offering from one of the dark stars of the chaos current. Dave Lee is perhaps the unsung hero of chaos magic. He was there pretty much at ground zero, along with Pete Carroll, but his name crops up less often in the history books than that of, say, Ray Sherwin. But by reading *Bright* you can catch up on how one of the longest serving magicians working in the

chaos style has developed.

This book is a tricky little beast, a Chinese box which weaves together, as one might expect several authorial voices. At one level this is a book about mythology, specifically the Norse myths as suggested by the volumes sub-heading 'Northern Tales in the Modern World'. But this is much more than a bland blah about which god smote which other, which dwarf gets to shag which goddess and all that. Dave Lee takes apart the myths using a variety of tools and shows us how they tick. More than this he also sets to re-writing some of these tales in a thoroughly modern idiom.

This is where another voice comes in, that of Dave Lee the (science) fiction writer. We get to imagine the consciousness of the ancient Norse gods written into AI software and are hurled, at times with dizzying speed, into a cyber culture universe in which Ásgarðr is just a mouse click away.

The fiction sections of the book are rich, even purple prose in style. It's as though Dave is trying to cram some of his best metaphors into these pages and so the resultant brew is a pretty heady one. (Although some turns of phrase are just lovely, who could forget, 'He enters the tunnel, stepping over a star of drying vomit'.) Hopefully *Bright* is just the beginning of Dave Lee the full-blown esoteric-cyberpunk novelist. (All the runes are looking good for this possibility; I've also got a copy of a slim volume 'Two Tribal Tales' which is more fiction from Mr Lee, released this year.)

Another voice calling us from The Well is that of the magician-technician. In the essays toward the end of the book Dave delves into one of his specialist interests; namely the relationship between magic and ecstasy. Developing ideas he played with in Chaotopia! Dave serves up a magnificent exploration (which I think is preferable to dogmatic certainty) of these concepts. And of course, as a confirmed chaos magician, there are bits of handy technique to try out.

This certainly isn't a book which one should read unless you know your *Liber Null* and *Liber Kaos*. It's not one to attempt if you are not on at least nodding terms with the sagas of Odin and his team. Finally you might not enjoy this unless you like you fiction to be brutal and decadent and mystical –

possibly all in the one sentence. But if you want an exploration of magic that's way deeper than usual, mythology that comes alive, and narrative that reeks of sinister poetry, then *Bright from The Well* is for you.

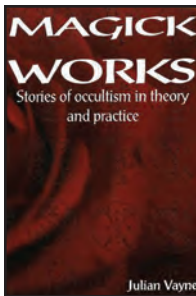
Reading *Bright* you'll also be getting a valuable window into the world of one magician who has quietly been influencing the unfolding of the chaos current for many moons. Dip down; drink a draft from Dave Lee's *Well*, and perhaps you too will see what this adventurous adept has perceived in the darkness. - Julian Vayne

*Mandrake Speaks* ([mandrake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:mandrake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com))

**Magick Works**, Julian Vayne

(Mandrake, 2008, 176pp, \$24.00)

Review by Dave Lee



Readers of books on paganism, chaos magic and psychoactive sacraments may well be familiar with Julian Vayne's characteristic mix of essay, ritual report and personal anecdote. This book reprises that blend – the subtitle is 'Stories of occultism in theory and practice' – and those who enjoy his vivid personal tales of magic will not be disappointed – he reveals a good deal of his personal magical history, telling how he came to magic and relating the magical dimensions of the birth of his son.

The essays are also very interesting, Vayne engaging with theoretical problems from his own special angle. Sex and drugs are woven into stirring and timely interpretations of paganism as a cult of ecstasy, a dimension generally neglected by more conventional (read 'bourgeois?') pagans. As promised by the cover blurb, Vayne also writes about 'gardening', in a very informative essay on 'Permaculture, Politics and Paganism'. Another aspect of interacting magically with our environment is explored in pieces on psychogeography. One of my favourite essays is 'The Use of the Imagination', in which he cleverly undoes the usual (and usually derogatory) notion that

imagination is not real. For instance: ‘The screen upon which we project our perceptions is imagination; it is the necessary condition of experience.’ The theme of imagination also impels a very rare feature of this book – a short ‘Manifesto of the Magickians’, a clarion call to engagement with the real world through the use of magick. A specific kind of engagement is suggested near the end of the chapter ‘The Fourth Path – Drugs, Entheogens and modern Paganism’, where readers are encouraged to support American Casey Hardison, imprisoned in the UK on a 20 year sentence for LSD manufacture.

Overall, this is a fine book, probably the best I’ve read of Vayne’s work. The prose is highly readable and mostly clear, with one startlingly indigestible exception, when he writes: ‘the baulked project of our inherent epistemophilia’, perhaps after indulging in an overdose of Baudrillard. However, I have to take issue with his curiously uncritical stereotype of the Left Hand Path magician, in which he sets up a straw-man-pictur of Black Brothers, ‘dwellers in the Abyss that wish to ‘stop growing, to become rigid and unbending’’, illustrating this with a quote from a Temple of Set website. In order to make my point I shall explore some ideas about what the purpose and goal of the magical path might be. The Perennial Philosophy has so far always been interpreted as having an endpoint in Union With God. Of the tiny minority who attempt the Great Work, many fail and few records exist. What has survived and gained the status of the canon of the Perennial Philosophy gives a self-selection that appears to offer a consistent picture of what attainment is like. Some of this is gorgeously seductive – who would not be lured onto the path by Thomas Traherne’s: ‘You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars.’ I certainly was, and for years I worked a mixture of LHP and RHP. Now I know myself better, and having investigated RHP techniques far more closely, I confirmed in the process that I belong to a particular subset of seekers – those who are constitutionally unable to believe in Big God to the extent of ever having any faith in that abstraction. Such seekers as myself can only hope to develop faith in some transpersonal influence much nearer to hand.

Not only that – the closer I approach to what mystical attainment is supposed to be, the less I like the look of much of the territory sketched out in the reports, not to mention the methods of getting there. For instance, I find sitting meditation itself a dubious practice, and am inclined to view with some reservations any interpretations of the sublime ecstasies that are proffered by someone who's spent 2 hours a day doing nothing. Something in me not only detests sitting doing nothing for 2 hours a day but finds suspect any philosophy that emerges from such a practice. I came to the firm conclusion that I do not seek union with God. The whole notion is dubious: Would you want to attain union with your lover? Because then you wouldn't be able to love her/him any more and the world would have been diminished by one individual consciousness. To put it another way, my Holy Guardian Angel is not a RHP mystic.

I strongly suspect there's an inborn capacity to appreciate the concept of Big God. There is some vindication of this from studies on separated twins, particularly behavioural geneticist Thomas J. Bouchard Jr's famous "Minnesota twins" study, from which he concludes that about 50% of the differences among people in their religious attitudes, interests, and values is accounted for by their genes. This is a contentious idea (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God\\_gene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_gene)), but if it's anywhere near the truth it means that when we god-minus genotypes explore higher consciousness we either have to shoehorn ourselves into a Procrustean bed of mainstream theology or write our own god-minus esoteric manuals.

And this opens up the question: What happens to the Self in the LHP? The Setians have a pretty good model. I find their Satanic glammers offputting, the kind of thing that initially made it hard for me to take them seriously, but their model fits rather well with the Northern mysteries model expounded by Edred Thorsson, in which we forever 'Seek the Mystery', approaching an infinite succession of veils, each of which parts to reveal another behind it. I suggest to Mr V that he might try reading 'Uncle Setnakht's Essential Guide to the Left Hand Path'. Don Webb's calm and lucid manual of LHP attainment gives the lie to the Black Brothers stereotype in

many ways, including supplying reasons to help other people! I can detect nothing more problematic in my reading of that book than a difference in personal style, and this is as it should be – each of us has to make our own way in these realms. In contrast to this, it strikes me that the most empty, frozen, in-the-fucking-way-type people are very Right Hand Path. Alternative-medical guru Deepak Chopra is a good example, with his sententious advice to just be nice, meditate (to crush your individuality), and hopefully make loads of money along the way, just like he did.

One description of what I'm doing now is working on 'building a soul'. This Work is common to Setians, Rune-Gild and many followers of Jung, who call this process Individuation. And that is far from an exhaustive list—Wayne himself writes (p74): 'the occultist cultivates an enchanted soul.' The higher levels of consciousness have been almost all articulated by RHP for a long time (and will continue to be so, because it's the easier path to understand in our strangely-warped world, where abstract notions so often trump living reality), but magicians like Webb and Thorsson are drawing together the threads of a Left Hand Path gnosis that shine (darkly) through the weave of the Perennial Philosophy.

*Mandrake Speaks (mandrake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)*

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## Contributors

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**Jed Bickman** is currently an MFA student at The New School (New York) in Nonfiction Writing. His first book, *A Literal Journey in India*, a nonfiction account of his personal engagement with Indian literature written in English, is forthcoming from Writers Workshop Press, Kolkata, and is under revision for American publication. His work has appeared in *Big Bridge* and the *Clerestory Review*. He blogs occasionally at [www.jedicist.org/blog](http://www.jedicist.org/blog) and can be contacted at [jed.bickman@gmail.com](mailto:jed.bickman@gmail.com)

**Ray Blackwood** is an english teacher at an adult education school in Dalian, China. In a search for creative expansion, he boarded a plane for adventure and touched down, after eleven hours, in a land of 1,000 faces. Fictional narrative is his passion and he has been writing short stories since the age of 10. Raymond is currently working on two novels and is fine tuning his social navigation skills in a foreign country.

**Anne Brooke's** fiction has been shortlisted for the Harry Bowling Novel Award, the Royal Literary Fund Awards and the Asham Award for Women Writers. She has also twice been the winner of the DSJT Charitable Trust Open Poetry Competition. Her latest poetry collection is *A Stranger's Table*, and her latest novel is *Maloney's Law*. Both are available from Amazon. More information can be found at [www.annebrooke.com](http://www.annebrooke.com) and she keeps a terrifyingly honest journal at <http://annebrooke.blogspot.com>.



**Thomas Fuchs** has spent much of his career writing television documentaries and some print non-fiction. Over the past few years, he has discovered the joy of imagining and inventing afforded by the writing of fiction.

**Eric Halliwell.** Carpenter, half a nurse, finally, school teacher. Then Eric chucked it for a Guatemalan lake, and poetry. Eric imprinted on poetry when he heard Yevgeny Yevtushenko say poems were ambulances. Ironically then, for Eric, E.E. Cummings reprised his World War I ambulance driver role. Eric's poetry has appeared in *Gentle Reader*, *Penwood Review*, *Ascent Aspirations*, *Word Catalyst*, and is upcoming in *Umbrella*.

**John P. Hill's** fiction has appeared in *Sou'wester*.

**Stephen R Killeen** is a 36-year-old citizen of nowhere who's in love with his Mind again--in love with all this madness visible in the blood. He kindly asks, "Why do you scold the Wolf for his dreams? I Know Nothing. I Imagine Everything."

**Raymond Luczak** is the author and editor of ten books, including *Eyes of Desire 2: A Deaf GLBT Reader* and *Assembly Required: Notes from a Deaf Gay Life*. His novel *Men with Their Hands* was the first place winner of Project: QueerLit 2006 Contest and was published in 2009 by Rebel Satori Press. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His web site is [www.raymondluczak.com](http://www.raymondluczak.com).

**Stefanie Maclin's** poetry and short fiction has appeared in *Abyss&Apex*, *The Maynard*, *Conversation Poetry Quarterly*, *Doorknobs&Bodypaint*, Vagabondage Press' *Battered Suitcase*, *Kaleidotrope*, *Poetica Magazine*, *Underground Voices*, Nine Arches Press' *Under the Radar Astropoetica*, *Divine Dirt Quarterly*, the Mizmor L'David Anthology: *The Shoah*, *Indigo Rising*, *Heavy Hands Ink*, *Stirfry* and *Poetic Diversity*. Stefanie has work forthcoming in *Ouborobos Review*, *Illumen*, *Star\*Line*, *Glasgow Review* and *Battered Suitcase*. She lives in Boston, MA, and when not writing poetry, works as

an librarian/archivist, having just completed her MLIS degree in May 2010.

**Michael P. McManus** has published short stories and flash fiction in numerous journals including: *3:AM*, *Lichen*, *Pittsburgh Quarterly*, *Dublin Quarterly*, *Contrary Magazine* and *Louisiana Literature*. He is the recipient of an Artist Fellowship Award from the Louisiana Division of the Arts for poetry.

**Lee Minh Sloca** was born in Saigon, Vietnam, where he escaped two weeks prior to its collapse. After attending UC Santa Cruz, he worked for 14 years in the mental health field with special needs children. Currently, he works as a freelance webmaster. This leaves time to attend a weekly poetry workshop at Beyond Baroque in Venice and to read at local poetry venues in Los Angeles. Lee's work has been in *Gentle Strength Quarterly*, *L.A. Melange: the first year of poeticdiversity* and *Beyond Baroque Magazine*.

**Ocean Vuong** was born in 1988 in Saigon, Vietnam, Ocean Vuong is the author of *Burnings*, forthcoming from Sibling Rivalry Press. He currently resides in New York City as an undergraduate English Major at Brooklyn College, CUNY. His poems have received an Academy of American Poets Prize, the Beatrice Dubin Rose Award, the Connecticut Poetry Society's Al Savard Award, as well as two Pushcart Prize nominations. His work appear in *Word Riot*, the *Kartika Review*, *Lantern Review*, *SOFTBLOW*, *Asia Literary Review*, and *PANK* among others. He enjoys practicing Zen Meditation and is an avid supporter of animal rights.

**Jaisyn Yemaya** is a 28 year old poet born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts and reborn spiritually into the Santeria religion in the Bronx. Since the age of 13, he has worked with helping his peers, youth, women and families in the Boston area with homelessness, safer life skills, safer sex skills, substance abuse issues and empowerment. Growing up in the worst parts of Boston during the crack epidemic in the 80's with a brother who was a gang member

proved to be challenging for Jaisyn. Enduring the pains of childhood and adolescence through rough situations, he found an outlet in writing. Since a very young age he has written poetry that is heartfelt and unique. Today he is aspiring to write a poetry book to be released by 2010. This multi-talented individual has shown creativity and ingenuity throughout his life and throughout his evolution of poetry. Now he is looking to share his life experiences and wisdom with the world.







*L'shana Tova, 5766 - Alevai - Rosh Hashana, 5770 - Devi - How To Get To Heaven, according to Google map - When ever She Dresses All Blues I Become Two - 4 Musings for A·Muse(ment) - Seven Meditations - Per Pilosa Ad Astra - Heresies - The Twelve Olympians - Iyawo - Little Angel - Beast - Charlie Whiskey - Spearing Ghosts at Golgotha - Returning to the Garden - The Stillness Distance of the Stars - One of Those Simultaneous Dichotomies - The Great Symbolism of Electricity - Worship - Remind Me*

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