

ASHÉ!

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY



ASHÉ!

“In the beginning was Ashé. Ashé was everything. When Aché began to think, Ashé became Olodumare.” –Yoruban creation myth

Ashé is the priestess dancing herself toward possession. Ashé is the thread that weaves itself into the infinite blanket of meditative equipoise. Ashé is the hermit lighting a candle for the great mother; the group coming together in geometric power for common purpose; the drag queen sitting in vipassana before a performance; the homeless teen talking to Buddha beneath the overpass sheltering rain and dharma.

Ashé is a primordial blend of Prana, Qi, Karma, Dharma, Prem, Agape, Will, and Bodhicitta.

“Ashé is the ultimate source of everything.”

ASHÉ-PREM



PREM

Prem is Agape, Compassion, Divine Love.

As Louis Martinié writes, “Love is the road that Will walks.” Love is the means of transmitting the energy of the firmament to humankind. When channeled through a guru, the Hindus call this energy *shaktipat*. Love in Greek is Agape whose numeric value is 93, which is the number of Greek Thelema, “Will”.

Baba defines PREM as “the ultimate reality, beyond the impersonal Deity, beyond undifferentiated potential. . . a warm beam of LOVE from within, the LOVE that has no selfish motive, the LOVE that is a spontaneous expression of the Divinity of Humankind.”

In the Qabalah, Love, PREM, arises through a balance combination of Wisdom (Chokmah) and Understanding (Binah). The Buddhists call this Love “compassion.”

Love, actualized in the process of division and dissolution, is the key to her mystery. Love is All. Love is Creation. Love is Nature. Love is Death. Love is God, where there is no God. PREM. ΑΓΑΠΕ.

ASHÉ-PREM



Contents

Odds & Ends, Farrell R. Davisson

Offshore Islands and Rocks, Ruth Moore

Epistemic Self Post Modernity, Sven Davisson

AH! Allen Ginsberg

Shangri-La, Trebor Healey

Polymorphous Blue Chat, Vivek Anand

Stop the Church, Jim Provenzano

Write And Find Ecstasy In Writing, part 1, Mogg Morgan

Write And Find Ecstasy In Writing, part 2, Mogg Morgan

Reviews

Books: *Found Tribe* Lawrence Schimel, *Mystics & Messiahs* Philip Jenkins,

The Life and Work of Marie LaVeau Raul Canizares, *The English Mahatma*

Mogg Morgan,

Music: *Sentir* Omar Sosa, *MoonMilk*, Coil

Cover: "Oshun" by Raul Canizares.

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Odds and Ends

Already burnished
a ceremonial bronze
the tardy oak leaf,
cued by the gale's
ending rattle, abandons
its roots to spiral
one last whimsical
heavenward tack until
succumbing to gravity,
returns its mite
to the teeming
debris below.

Farrell R. Davisson





Ruth Moore

The Offshore Islands

The offshore islands belong to themselves
 They stand in their own sea.
 They do not inherit; they leave no heirs.
 They are no man's legacy.

Blazing volcanoes, cooled and dead,
 Marked nowhere a boundary line.
 The rise and fall of oceans left
 Not one no trespassing sign.

The money was never minted,
 The clutch of its greed so strong
 It could honor a deed: TO HAVE AND TO HOLD,
 And keep these wild lands long.

RS

The first summer people were Indians.
For some five thousand years
They built up shore-line shell heaps before
They lost to the pioneers.

The white man took what he wanted.
He had privilege, laws, and guns.
He made fast his own boundary lines
And his property went to his sons.

From the west they sailed in Chebacco boats,
And the high-sterned pinkys, Essex-made.
In harbors where water was deep enough,
Their schooners carried a coast-wise trade.

The homesteads they made were sturdy,
But those who built near the shores
Had to dig, if they didn't want Indian shells
All over their cellar floors.

Then time slipped by, as inheritance does.
They felt the mainland's pull.
They abandoned their homes to rot away,
And their cemeteries full.



Theirs was the time of history
And written records show
That their hold on the offshore islands began
Less than four hundred years ago.

Now comes the era of real estate,
Of the hundred thousand dollar lots,
Of the condominiums, side by side,
Along the shoreline choicest spots.

What follows the time of developers
No human voice can tell.
But the silent offshore islands know,
And they handle their mysteries well.

They speak with a voice that is all their own,
And this is what they say:
That they talk in terms of a billion years
That their now is not today.
And the ghosts they brought along with them
Have never gone away.

Ruth Moore



Rocks

The rocks of the earth are its history.
Dinosaur tracks they hold,
They tell what's known of who got here first,
They say how old is old.

Fossil shells on mountain sides
Mark there the depth of seas
That rose and fell without the changing tides
Of numberless centuries.

Creatures came, but not to stay.
Diplodocus lies in his deep.
Time-tried and tossed away
The ammonides sleep.

But not the same are the fossils found
In the Age of Inquisitive Man,
For the tallest mountains wore down to the ground
Three times and are rising again.

Who can write on Time's dust
The secret ebb and flow
Of what roared over the earth's crust
Billions of years ago?



Fierce fires still rage on earth, and within
Rocks shift and fissures crack
What difference now to who started in
And never did come back?

For the home of Man is already rock,
While his triumphs are shouted and sung,
Whatever volcano or earthquake shock
Tell him how young is young.

The rocks of the earth hold secrets,
Weathered, battered, brown.
Yet a pebble found in a wayside ditch
Might be cut for a king's crown;
And a certain beach-rock, tossed by the tides,
Holds a shimmer all its own.
It takes a polish of silent dark,
As if a black moon shone.

The lapidary who cuts a gem,
Slices his agates thin.
With professional care he handles them,
Finds out what lies within.
For the outside crust of an agate stone
Looks dingy—of little worth.
But inside, when shaped and polished, are some
Of the loveliest colors on earth.



Design is there—mathematical—
A scientist wouldn't be fooled
Over what happened inside a rock
When the gases stiffened and cooled.
But sometimes a difference creeps in,
As the lapidaries know,
When polish shows up a landscape of trees,
With a background of snow.

Or a perfect scene of a big white owl
Sitting poised on the limb of a tree.
What of scientific logic then?
For how could this *happen* to be?

Does some hidden consciousness live in rocks,
Who pokes fun at the human race,
And leaves a portrait for someone to find
Of the devil in hell with flames at his back
And a horrible monkey face?

The lapidary who found this scene
Is thinking, wondering still.
But nobody has an answer to this,
And I don't think anyone will.

Ruth Moore



**An Asceticism of Being:
Foucault & the Epistemology of Self, Post Modernity**

Sven Davisson

*I pay homage to the guru, the divine friend,
Mahatma Guru Shri Paramahansa Shivaji, Osho, Baba-ji*

The mental focus of the past several decades, in the West, has been marked by a heightened quest for essence, sometimes internal sometimes external—a quest always figured within the reputedly “private” and, paradoxically, articulated in the unquestionably public. Identity politics, the contrasting concurrent philosophy of postmodernism, arose as a reaction to the egalitarian prerogatives of the post-60’s humanist agenda and the latter’s attempts to eradicate the social ills of racism, homophobia, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, etc. by erasing difference. This trend in the political has been mirrored by an even more pervasive, and persuasive, movement in the, at times, overlapping areas of religion and spirituality. This mirroring has proved all the more pronounced for its easy collusion with the “soul-searching” inherent in the polemic of historic religiosity. In general, spirituality in the West has been transfigured historically in terms of an heroic quest for the soul and through this knowledge obtaining a closeness to God. In the twentieth century this has been secularized into a search for the soul in order to gain a closeness to Self. The loosely connected grouping of overlapping mystical schemas and recycled pop self-improvements generally termed the New Age Movement typifies this essentialized spiritual quest.

To know ‘who we are’ has become increasingly synonymous with spirituality. Since the earliest roots of Christian mysticism knowing has been posited as *the* means for achieving a closeness to God. French post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault pointed out that the entire process was shaped around a search for increased “individualization.” “We try to seize what’s at the bottom of the soul of the individual,” he said. “‘Tell me who you are’, there is the spirituality of Christianity.” (Foucault, “Michel Foucault and Zen,” 1999, p. 112) This internal, personal questing for the “secret” within is the philosopher’s stone of the Western metaphysi-



cal alchemist. This quest relies on two presumptive assertions: it both reifies the soul and elevates it to the ultimate embodiment of truth. It remains almost unthinkable to question if there is a subjective self and that subjectivity should itself be the object of knowledge. Foucault artfully problematized both these, seemingly immutable, assertions. In his histories of the clinic, the criminal system, the epistemology of knowledge and sexuality, Foucault was examining the role of subjectivity and its relation to both knowledge and power. Foucault argued that modern man finds himself in an “ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows.” (Foucault, 1970, p. 312) Outlining Foucault’s position Daniel Palmer observes “for Foucault, such attempts to constitute individuals as objects of their own knowledge is both theoretically dubious and socially perilous.” (Palmer, 1998, p. 408)

The religious expression of Western Judeo-Christian culture has been marked by its imputation of and relation to the Soul. That each human being has a soul is the axiom at the central to its dogmas, while the redemption of the soul is the steel that forms the girders of its framework. The soul is something to be cared for—saved, purged, cleansed and protected in a circular movement of sin and confession. This is, of course, manifested with difference within the various prismatic subdivisions that have arisen since the Schism, but at the heart of it all remains the soul as essence. Over the course of 19th century, the previous century’s imperative mechanism of the institutionalized religious confessional was secularized by transference to the analyst’s couch. (Foucault, 1980, pp. 63, 65-7) Psychoanalysis, oxymoronic at its inception, proposed to assist one in (re)gaining agency over oneself by abdicating free will to a chaotic neurosis of bio-impulses and synaptic whim.

The soul figures no less prominently within Eastern philosophy. It is that which reincarnates and as such is an unquestioned facet in the cosmology of Hinduism and its proto-modernist child Buddhism. The soul moves as a static element within a dynamic structure of change and remanifestation across the boundaries of life, death and species. “A sober person is not bewildered by such a change.” *Baghavad-gita* 2:13. (Prabhupada, 1985, p. 93) Within the Brahman philosophical structure the soul is something that is at once distinct from the body while residing within the body. “The sky, due to its subtle nature, does not mix with anything although it is all-pervading. Similarly, the soul situated in Brahma vision does not mix with the body, though situated in that body.” *Baghavad-gita* 13:33 (Prabhupada, 1985, p. 678) The soul is something other within—a particular of the infinite. In his comment on verse 13:34 Swami Prabhupada describes it as “a small particle of spirit soul ... situated in the heart.” (Prabhupada, 1985, pp. 678-9) The soul provides



the animus to the corporeal edifice of bone, sinew, muscle, and flesh. Verse 13:34 of the *Gita* likens the soul to the sun, illuminating the body with consciousness as the sun does the earth with light.

Buddhist philosophy, of course, extends the discussion to conventionally reify the soul in the relative while, simultaneously, arguing for the inherent emptiness of the same soul in an ultimate sense. Traditionally, Buddhists hold that beings do have a soul. It is the soul which is tied to the cycle of birth and re-birth—*samsara*—and it is the release of the soul which signifies the realization of *nirvana*. While accepting the Brahmic notion of *karma*, Buddhism rejects the essential nature of the soul or self. To the Buddhist, the soul is as empty (devoid of essence) as everything else in cyclic existence. Central to (Mahayana, Greater Vehicle) Buddhism is the teaching of the two truths, conventional and ultimate. The first, conventional truth, is the relative approach to the world which allows for the mundane perception and the utility of the phenomenal world. The second, ultimate truth, is the realization that all things are dependently arisen, mutable and lacking of inherent essence.

The religious modus historically has been marked by a search for absolute interiority—with the possible exception of certain Buddhist traditions (see post-script). (Palmer, 1998, p. 408) Since the Delphic directive to “know thyself” the search has been on. This operative assumption has been that an essence of self exists within and that it is something to be discovered and revealed. This process is most marked in the doctrines of the Christian West, partaking as they do of the inheritance of their Greco-Roman forebears. The entire discursive and liturgical power of the church has been directed to this end. This is a phenomenology endemic to the past 2,000 years and initially articulated in the writings of Soranus, Rufus of Ephesus, Plutarch, Seneca and other physicians and philosophers of the first two centuries. The early Christians borrowed heavily from this “insistence on the attention that should be brought to bear on oneself.” (Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self," 1999; Foucault, 1988, pp. 39-41) These early Christian philosophers and mystics differed from their Greco-Roman predecessors diverting “the practices of self towards the hermeneutics of self and the deciphering of oneself as a subject of desire.” (Foucault and Kritzman ed., 1988, p. 260) It should be pointed out that the shift from the ethos of antiquity to the compulsion to self-examination was not exclusively Christian. (McNeill, 1998, pp. 59-60) Throughout this period, the self-analytic imperative evolved through the Catholic confessional and protestant witnessing of the declaration of sinful acts to the modern focus on the secular confessions of psychiatry and self-referential identity discourse. The West has limited itself to the knowledge of the subjective “I.” The dictum of



Delphi to ‘know thyself’ has become both the spiritual and secular order of knowing. The Eastern conceptions of the soul developed along somewhat similar lines, though the fragmentary nature of Eastern practice (lacking Pope or Patriarch) allowed for marked divergence as well. Consequently the focus on interiority was not as markedly pronounced in the East as it was in the West. The Hindus posited a self as a fragment that resided in the body along side a Supersoul, which was nothing less than the face of the Godhead. This fragment, being part of the divine, was not changeable. The Buddhist sought through meditation to dissolve the self—more appropriately the reification of self—by the full and experiential realization of emptiness. In contrast to the Hindu belief, the Buddhists held that the soul, or self, is constantly undergoing change and is, therefore, ultimately empty of inherent existence.

Foucault argued that this interrogation of self was aligned with a compulsion to discourse first applied with the monastic confessional and then, later, moved outside of the monastery walls. Eventually, by the advent of the 19th century, the confession and its puritan counterpart, the public repentance of transgression, were a ubiquitous element of most social structures. The origin of this compulsion was the focus of Foucault’s later work. His 1979-1980 course at Collège de France explored “how a type of government of men is formed in which what is required is not simply to obey but also to reveal, by saying it, what one is.” (Eribon, 1991, p. 317) In Foucault’s analysis this compulsion was a productive rather than repressive force. In the groundbreaking first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault unilaterally rejected the “repressive hypothesis” favored by historians. He argued, rather, that the concern for self, as sexuality, was ubiquitous in the Victorian world. Rather than being repressed and unequivocally silenced, sex and transgression were routinely the subject of both academic concern and particular public dialogue. Even silence, he noted, was a particular type of discourse.

The repressive model rests on the notion that there are ‘powers’ that are doing this ‘to us’—a model which is appealing by virtue of providing something to ‘speak out’ against. (Foucault, 1980, pp. 7, 27) The processes Foucault proposes differ greatly from this absolutist model. He observed power as multitudinous lines coming at one from all directions. ‘Power from above’ was far too simple, for Foucault. He replaced the theory of hegemonic power with a more subtle ‘relations to power.’ “Power is everywhere,” he wrote, “not because it encloses everything, but because it comes from everywhere.” He described this power as a “moving substrate of force relations.” (Foucault, 1980, p. 82)

In the 19th century the simple discourse of the Christian pastoral exploded



into a diverse pleroma of scientific and pedagogic discourses. This process transformed what was once discreet acts into evidence of identity. Previous to this shift, acts were not constitutive of an identity. The Christian metaphysicians held that everyone was capable of sin, therefore a sinful, transgressive act, did not imbue an individual with any note of difference. Suddenly in the middle to late 19th century, a list of scientific, medical and psychological categories came into existence—the criminal, the insane, the invert, etc. The compulsion to discourse, once confined to confession and penitence, was easily transferred to this new arena. Over the course of just a few decades, science insisted on the labeling and placement of the individual. Even the concept of the ‘normal’ was codified later and only in relation to the polymorphous mass of categories.

Foucault argues that no essential element resides at the core of the subjective. Foucault stated in his critique of the essentialist position that the search for such an inner “self,” the *raison d’être* of the modernist impulse defining identity politics, always proves fruitless at its ultimate extension.(Foucault, et al., 1984) This position can be easily extended to the larger view of self and soul: No essential nature (or identity) exists, thus the search for the root of subjectivity leads irrefutably to a dead end. No core exists at the heart of the onion, nor does a wagon remain once its constitutive parts are removed. In his critique of post-Hegelian identity, Chris Cutrone writes, “The idealist construction of the subject founders on its falsely taking subject to be objective in the sense of something existing in-itself, precisely what it is not: measured against the standard of entities, the subject is condemned to nothingness.”(Cutrone, 2000, p. 263)

Foucault’s analysis asks the critical question why the relation one has to oneself has to be one of knowledge. Explicitly, this forced him “to reject a certain *a priori* theory of the subject.” Foucault argued that such a rejection of the basis of Western ontology was necessary to achieve his examination of the “relationships which can exist between the constitution of the subject or the different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power, and so forth.” (McNeill, 1998, p. 59) Ultimately, Foucault fully rejects the assumption that knowledge equates to knowledge of self and that the only relation that we can have with ourselves is as a object of observation. (Palmer, 1998, p. 408) Simply put, Foucault argues that there is nothing there to find. The Western mystics’ Quest for total individualization is an ontologic dead end. Palmer states this position succinctly, “there is no deep truth

*In the sphere I am everywhere the centre, as she, the
circumference is nowhere found. —Liber AL vel Legis (II:3)*



about ourselves.” (Palmer, 1998, p. 408) In a 1982 interview Foucault articulated this position in a lighter tone, “I don’t feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become something else that you were not in the beginning.” (“Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault,” 1988, p. 9) Palmer highlights two distinct problems Foucault exposed with any attempt “to found a systemic and positive knowledge about ourselves.” The first centers on the “plausibility” of successfully achieving such knowledge; the second points to the “practical implications” of positioning ourselves as subjects of our own knowledge. (Palmer, 1998, p. 402)

Questions of subjectivity and the epistemic self have arisen as the driving questions in the dialogue of modernism through to postmodernism. Is everything relative to the subjectivity of the perceiver? Does subjectivity exist? If so is it relative, empty or absolute? What is the relation between self and other? Does such a relation even exist and if so what are its constituent parts? This philosophical (and political) dialogue has been paralleled by the increasing personalization of the spiritual quest. As the Golgotha of institutionalized religion has slowly eroded, the rise of subjective relativist spiritual agendas have grown—either in small to medium groups, the so-called “New Religious Movements,” or on a completely personal solitary level. More often than not this has resembled the postmodernist artistic aesthetic, creating a heterozygous amalgam of appropriated imagery, icons and philosophical precepts. The trend has been to center these historical and/or cultural fragments around a drive for ferreting out the root of one’s essence—whether termed Being, self or inner child.

Nobody in the whole history of consciousness has been able to say why he is. All that one can do is shrug your shoulders: I am, there is no question of why.—Osho

Foucault instead proposed a process involving a creative approach to the self. For Foucault, the emptiness of self-essence logically demanded a productive relation between one and one’s self. The self and its relationships (to others, to power and to categorizations) is something that is mutable, dynamic, limited only by the conceptual limitations of the self at any given socio-historic nexus. Of this Palmer says, “Truth (for Foucault) is not passively deciphered, but is dynamically created.” (Palmer, 1998, p. 409) Foucault termed this process ‘*askesis*,’ ‘ascetical practice’ or creative expansion. In an interview he described *askesis* as “something else: it’s the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the *self* appear that happily one never attains.” (Foucault, 1989, p. 206) *Askesis* is the Greek root of asceticism and Foucault intentionally uses this term to link



back to a classical philosophical tradition he examined in depth in *The Care of Self*, volume three of his *History of Sexuality*. His taxonomic choice reflects Foucault's emphasis on a deliberate, hermeneutic approach. Through this he attempts to resurrect a notion that the self is something to be cultivated rather than explored. The soul is distinct for its potential not its inherency. Foucault, however, is not simply invoking antiquity, as some of his critics have charged, as a call to move back to some remote "golden age." He is using, instead, the oppositional model of Greek *ethos* to destabilize deeply ingrained, modern conceptions of self and identity.

In his discussion of Foucault's philosophy, Palmer describes Foucault's asceticism as a process "not to decipher what we 'really' are, but to strive to cultivate what we might become." (Palmer, 1998, p. 408) Foucault himself argued that "the main interest in life and work is to become something else that you were not in the beginning." ("Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault," 1988, p. 9) For Foucault the self is something to be "cultivated," tended, shaped through the application of a creative mechanism. Knowledge is the knowledge one presents to the world and discovers through the process of creation, not the knowledge that one finds hidden in one's self. The mind, body and spirit reach to grab at a great, limitless truth, rather than delving internally for an essential atom of meaning.

For Foucault who we are, our self if you will, is inextricably linked to where, when and how we are. No unified, pure, absolute self exists. Instead, the individual is a mosaic of fragmentary moments, memories, genetics and cultural genealogy. Here he is building directly off of Martin Heidegger's theories of Being. Palmer describes Heidegger's philosophy as "pointing out that we do not exist first as isolated Cartesian egos but are acculturated into a set of shared social practices that allow entities or beings to be disclosed to us in specific meaningful ways." (Palmer, 1998, p. 403) It is impossible to separate who we are from where we have come from and where we have been. Our interpretations of the world (and, if directed inwards, ourselves) is shaped by our family, culture, past relationships; we are at each moment the totality of our conditioning. Again summarizes Heidegger, Palmer states "there can be no human nature as it were; there are only specific interpretations of what it means to be a human being in specific cultures." (Palmer, 1998, p. 403) The entirety of Foucault's intellectual corpus is centered around the inseparability of self from conditioning. Despite later interpretations to the contrary, Foucault never argued for a totality of social-construction. Rather, like Heidegger before him, he endeavored to point out the social conditions in which being functions in an attempt to expose the unseen and, therefore, unexamined lines of power which constrain the individual.



In this *askesis*, Foucault proposed a ongoing process in which boundaries are mapped so that they can be pushed at. His focus was the direct opposite of the internal quest. He argued for an expansion of self, pushing outwards towards a limit which is always just beyond reach. In an interview given just prior to his death, he outlined this view, “the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation.”(Foucault, et al., 1984) Foucault’s *praxis* calls for the individual to stand in opposition to those forces which seek to hinder his knowledge. James Miller, in his *Passions of Michel Foucault*, summarizes this mode of being: “To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments” but, rather, as the result “of a complex and difficult elaboration.”(Miller, 1993, p. 333) In this way Foucault gives agency back to the individual. Our bodies and ourselves are not a territory to be mined but one to molded, shaped and re-shaped. “Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of human bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves.”(Miller, 1993, p. 346) Through this process one increasingly realizes the mutability of both identity and truth. As Palmer points out, one reaches the realization that “categories are precisely historical and contingent and not universal and necessary.” (Palmer, 1998, p. 407) Foucault’s *Genesis* is a call for us to be something else—his *Song of Solomon* his own personal exploration of the sexual underground.

For Foucault the interrogation of self proved in fact to be a mechanism of oppression. Many of his works outline the process of knowing and the way in which the process constrains the individual. In his *History of Sexuality volume one*, Foucault methodically outlines the way in which the compulsion to discourse actually worked as a mechanism of power that effectively channeled sexuality rather than overtly oppressing it. The goal of his intellectual work, in his own words, was an attempt to explicate “the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.” (Palmer, 1998, p. 406) Foucault brings into question the relation we have with knowledge and the relation one has with oneself. He proposes the application of a life-long process of personal unfolding, rather than private/public revelation. His theory, asks us to resist the impulse to analyze who we are and corollary compulsion to confess incessantly. He calls on the individual to enlarge themselves through a process of perpetual redefinition—a process that culminates in the realization of the impermanent nature of the world and truth. Rather than seeking to reveal a internal hidden nature, he urges us to resist the categories that been placed within—a placement we have been blinded to by the inculcated focus on interiority. Foucault described his goal in



very precise and eloquent terms: “That is *what* I tried to reconstitute: the formation and development of a practice of self whose aim was to constitute oneself as the worker of the beauty of one’s own life.” (Foucault and Kritzman ed., 1988, p. 259)

Postscript Foucault & Zen

In the spring of 1978 Foucault traveled to Japan intending to be initiated into Zen Buddhism. At the suggestion of his master Omori Sogen, head of the Seionji temple in Uenohara, Foucault spent several days living the life of a monk. (Eribon, 1991, p. 310) Foucault’s discussion with the priests of the temple were published in the Japanese review *Shunjû* and, later, the French journal *Umi*. Foucault acknowledged his interest in Buddhist but admitted what interested him most “is life itself in a Zen temple, that is to say the practice of Zen, its exercises and its rules. For I believe that a totally different mentality to our own is formed through the practice and exercises of a Zen temple.” (Foucault, "Michel Foucault and Zen," 1999, p. 110) During the course of these discussions, Foucault emphasized the principle difference he saw between Zen practice and the Christian practice of individualisation:

As for Zen, it seems that all the techniques linked to spirituality are, conversely, tending to attenuate the individual. Zen and Christian mysticism are two things you can’t compare, whereas the technique of Christian spirituality and that of Zen are comparable. And, here, there exists a great opposition. In Christian mysticism, even when it preaches the union of God and the individual, there is something that is individual. The one is he who loves and the other is he who is loved. (Foucault, "Michel Foucault and Zen," 1999, p. 112)

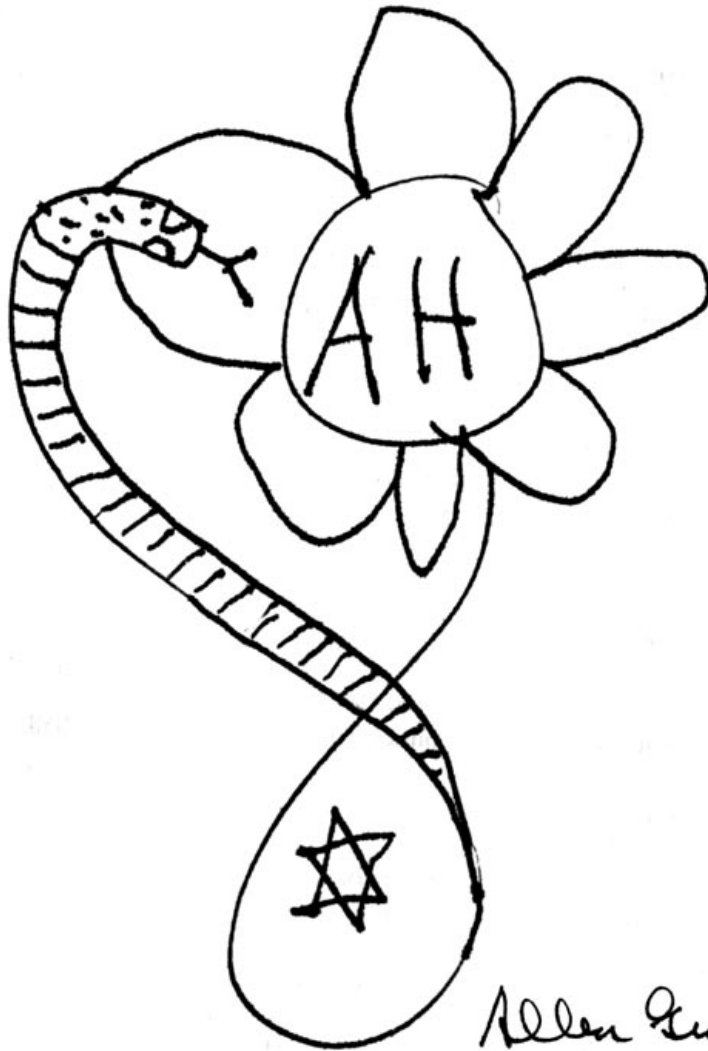
The basic, the fundamental being is the same, not only in human beings but in *all* beings. The tree has a being—only its body is different from you; and the tiger has a being—only its body is different from you. The differences are only on the circumference. The center is always the same because the center is one. The name of the center is God.—Osho, *The Dhammapada: The Way of the Buddha*, vol. 4



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Allen Ginsberg
3/22/88

AS

Shangri-La

Trebor Healey

I think of the hospital as we make love. The ritual of it, putting this here and that there and doing things to one another, so like surgery. Do we surface horribly scarred I wonder, or healed—or is it a little or a lot of both?

We're silent, sheltered under the blinking neon, which I thought just then was like some mother's heart beating for two dark twins in the uterus of the city, as yet unborn. I know I am his only friend now, though he's talked of friends from all across the country. He's lost touch with most (they too were moving and wouldn't be traceable anyway), or had final arguments that left them estranged. He tells me now, out of nowhere, that many accused him of stealing things from them, as if it were the most outrageous and unlikely of suspicions to have toward him.



Sven Davisson

“Did they steal from you too?”

He looked at me like I was being ridiculous. “I don't have anything. What the fuck would someone steal from me?” I think of his ideas, his energy and brilliance, his unique physical beauty—they'd likely fed off that as I had. But he gives himself no credit. I'm beginning to think that his whole life is an ugly barter with the world—he steals and is stolen from.

I looked over at his slouched little boxes that held all his possessions. I'd never really looked at them before, but suddenly I noticed addresses written on them. I hopped out of bed, and read them, pausing as the light came and went. All of



them read the same: ‘Denver.’

“The boxes are from Denver, Vince!” I said triumphantly. “That’s where you were.”

“I’ve been there a thousand times, Neill.”

“Well, that’s where you got the boxes,” I said, smiling.

“You’re a real fucking Colombo or whoever.”

“Come on, Vince, what happened there?”

“Nothing happened there, Neill, fucking nothing.” And he said it firmly so I wouldn’t ask again.

“I’ve never been to Denver.”

“It’s a shitty place,” he said apathetically. “Only the mountains are cool, you can see ’em out there on a clear day—these big, fucking rocks covered in snow. That’s all that’s good about Denver.”

“Did you ever go out to them? —the mountains I mean.”

“No, I just looked at ’em, Neill.”

“Let’s go to the mountains, Vince,” I said with enthusiasm then. He didn’t match my exuberance as he answered indifferently, ‘sure, whatever,’ so I didn’t consider it necessarily something that would happen. It involved a lot of planning after all; it wasn’t something you just did. But I thought then I wanted to share that with him. I thought that was something I could give him.

He was thinking of those other mountains still. “I was in Denver for two years, Neill, and I was a junkie the whole time. Nothing happened,” and he said it bitterly. “You fucking happy now?!” And he said it angrily like I’d pulled it out of him. He even pushed me, so I got up from the bed. *Even I* had an urge for a cigarette then. The claustrophobia of that tiny little room and the shifting weather of it was almost unbearable at times.

I yanked up the window and sat on the sill. “How can I love you if you don’t tell me your story, Vince?” I chanced, knowing it might fall flat, as it did.

“What the fuck does that mean, Neill? In fact, all that proves is how incapable of love you are.” And he was once again off. “You gotta know everything to try to convince yourself that I’m loveable. Well, I’m not, asshole!” And he looked directly at me. “My parents supposedly loved me, so I’m not interested in your fucking love either. You can dig me all up, spread me all over the fucking street, you won’t find what you’re looking for, Neill.”

“Your parents didn’t love you, Vince.”

“What the fuck do you know?” he snapped angrily.

“I love you already, that’s why I want to know everything. I want to get



closer to you.”

“Well, don’t, you’re way too fucking close as it is. Quit while you’re ahead.”

He got up now and violently yanked up his pants and put on his clothes.

“I don’t want to talk about me or ‘love’ or any of this shit anymore,” he commanded. “You fucking hear me? Quit asking me to spill all this shit! I don’t like it, Neill; I don’t like to fucking remember it! I hate my fucking life!” He was yelling at top volume now, and I was just sitting their half in shock and half in awe. “And if you’re a fucking part of it, I hate you too!” He was about to start balling, but he sucked it up, and went to the sink and splashed cold water in his face, breathing heavily to calm his nerves.

“Let’s go, let’s get the fuck out of this fucking room!” he exclaimed. I did what he said, stood up and put on my jacket. He slammed the door behind us. I knew better than to even offer a sorry. Too bad the old geezer coming toward us from the other direction couldn’t read his mood. He was muttering, and it rose to an audible level as we drew nearer.

“Know ye the wages of Sodom....”

“Oh fuck you, you Christian pile of shit; a lot of good Jesus has done you!”

Vince barked at him, scooping up a discarded shoe from the floor and firing it at him at high speed. I’d never seen this guy before and almost wanted to warn him, but he only shielded his face and smiled as the shoe ricocheted off his shoulder, probably comforting himself with the satisfying martyrdom of the attack on his ‘walk with God,’ or whatever he called his rotten, judgmental way of greeting so-called ‘sinners.’ Who’s the pervert? I wondered to myself.

Vince pushed the down button and told the geezer, “The booze will wait old man; you take a step closer to me and I’ll fucking rip your heart out and feed it to Satan!” The guy stood back, needless to say. Vince explained on the trip down that the man was a hopeless alcoholic who spent most of his time at a bar two doors down. “He’s usually too drunk to proselytize, but I guess after a nap or whatever, he feels guilty and wants to dump all his shit on someone else, the motherfucker.” I noticed Vince was pale and shaking. But I didn’t dare mention it.

The old geezer wasn’t alone of course in having problems with Vince. He never complained at the desk though as he likely didn’t want lost souls getting away before he converted them. But other people did. It’s not like the hotel would investigate any claims as most of them were of the ‘he’s an asshole, that guy in Room 645, you oughtta kick him out of here’ variety. He said, she said, blah, blah, blah. Vince was not in the minority thinking that everyone here was crazy.

“What did he do?” the Arab would tiredly ask, when a complaint against



Vince or anyone else was lodged.

‘He called me a bitch!’ or some such would be the reply.

The Arab would nod, unimpressed. “OK, I’ll ask him about it.” The Arab liked Vince more or less, but he didn’t want to deal with these people anymore than Vince did, and Vince was making his difficult job more so. He told him one afternoon before we went up, “Vince, don’t argue with people so much. I’ll kick you the fuck out.”

“Yea, yea,” Vince would reply flippantly.

“I’m serious,” and he ran his index finger across his throat. He only gave Vince more leeway than others because he wasn’t as crazy or fucked-up as the other residents, and he paid on time. Sane people are attractive tenants in such a setting no matter how rude or arrogant they behave.

Vince stopped once outside the big glass doors and he looked almost disoriented. I’d wondered where we were going, but suddenly it looked like he was at a complete loss. I don’t know what made me do it, but I just grabbed him and held him hard to myself and he squeezed back with even more gusto.

He released me and shook his head hard, like a dog after rain, and then growled out a deep roar, before blinking his eyes and saying, composed again, “I shouldn’t have done that.”

I just looked at him as he became his old self again, full of ideas and places and things to show me. “Come on, you need to come to this Tibetan place with me, man.” ‘Oh that,’ I thought. I hadn’t read the book he’d given me, and wasn’t terribly enthused about visiting whatever place he had in mind, but I wasn’t going to be contrary just now. A little jaunt would do us both some good I figured. We’ll let the world absorb and neutralize our pain; dissipate it; blow it away like unlucky blossoms or dead leaves in the wind.

“Did you read the book?” he asked me.

“Some of it,” I bluffed. I’d actually only looked at the pictures, one of which, I thought now, Vince had assumed the character of for the past 10 minutes.

“You need this shit if anyone does,” he said arrogantly, though I felt suddenly very together considering. This shit was apparently Buddhism, a Zen assessment if there ever was one. “It’s up near the park.”

“What is? Where are we going?”

“Something ‘gotso’ or some name like that. I don’t fucking know Tibetan,” he answered impatiently. “Anyway, you’ll see. There’s a lama there; he’s kinda cool. I met him a few days ago.”

“At the Zen Center?” I queried.



“Fuck no, not at the Zen Center. You know I don’t go there anymore. This guy’s Tibetan anyway.”

Vince had once taken me to the Zen Center on one of our day-long excursions around town, but of course that was Japanese Buddhism, not Tibetan, as he’d just now reminded me. We’d gone looking for the Zen Center after he’d read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*—though it was probably the author’s nervous breakdown more than the book’s Buddhist philosophy that had first inspired Vince to seek it out. A sprawling brick renovated girls’ school from 80 or 100 years ago, the Zen Center was surrounded by trees and always looked to me like the kind of place you’d want to go inside of and look around. And it didn’t disappoint. It was replete with stairways and arched little windows, courtyards full of plants and old relics and bells from the mysterious faraway worlds of the Buddhas. We went to the zendo and did the meditation, after which I remember walking down Haight Street while Vince enthusiastically and maniacally went on and on about his newfound desire to go live in a cave or mountain meditation center where he’d heal all his wounds and leave this wretched and impure world behind forever. I was surprised he’d be interested in anything so structured, or with any kind of rules other than his own for that matter. Vince always seemed an unlikely candidate for Buddhism. Wasn’t it about patience and peace of mind? But I figured it was just another of his momentary enthusiasms, like film school and all the rest.

Sure enough, a few weeks later, his Zen plan and its promise of enlightenment self-destructed. He’d had a run-in with another ‘practitioner’ on one of his visits there who’d made the mistake—the ‘zealous, little, by-the-book, new age creep’ Vince later called him—of grabbing Vince’s shoulder and gently turning him since he’d accidentally faced the wrong way in the zendo. But no one touched Vince without permission, gently or otherwise. “I don’t like those people,” he’d decided after that, and I assumed that was the end for Buddhism.

But just as one book had led him to the Zen Center, it was yet again this *Tibetan Book of the Dead* of his—with the aid of an old junkie acquaintance—that had brought him propitiously into contact with the lama. Vince had met the lama while foraging with his drug connection through Golden Gate Park, on his way to score some acid or whatever else might be available up on hippie hill.

“I met this guy in the park,” Vince continued as we hopped on the streetcar, paid our fare and plopped down. “He was sitting on a bench, and Hal dragged me over to meet him. You know, I’d fuckin’ read that book, so I wanted to ask him some shit. I never even got the acid,” he laughed. “Tibetan Buddhism *is* acid,” Vince beamed, “it’s nothing like that Zen crap.”



“So what’s this place we’re going to then?” I asked him, curious, but also skeptical. I’d noticed that he was careful to point out that Tibetan Buddhism was altogether different from Zen, thus preventing me from possibly protesting that he was being inconsistent.

“Shangri-La,” Vince joked, answering me sarcastically, before telling me. “It’s like a house they’ve turned into a Tibetan shrine. There aren’t loads of people like the Zen Center; that’s what Hal says anyway.” The less people the better was a general rule with Vince of course. He was always more drawn to ideas: the ideas pulled him in and the people drove him away. What an indictment of religion, I thought. One of his many ratty old t-shirts—erotic memories: how many had he worn, and had he worn this one when aroused and refusing to remove his shirt?—said ‘God, Save Me From Your Followers.’ Soon he’d make his own, with a black felt marker, a variation on a theme: ‘If you see a Buddhist in the zendo, kill him.’

“You haven’t been there?” I asked, slightly vexed.

“No, I told you I just met him,” he looked at me as if I were stupid.

Cho Phel Gyatso Center of Tibetan Buddhism was out near Golden Gate Park, within view of the hospital on the hill where Peter had been cut up. How strange, I thought briefly to myself, before dismissing it: yet another new and mysterious thing, like Vince, loitering around ground zero and close to the knives. Maybe I wasn’t living in two different worlds after all.

We crossed the Panhandle, a long narrow section of the park that ran out between two boulevards near its eastern entrance. It was a blustery day, as this was summer in San Francisco, and the high branches of the giant eucalyptus trees whipped about, looking furious and put-upon. We reached the opposite side, and crossing the street, saw before us the red and gold painted Victorian which was our destination.

We climbed up the house’s steep wooden steps and knocked. A middle-aged woman opened the door for us, smiling and saying hello softly. Vince told her we were there to see Lama Tenzin, and she asked us if we had an appointment.

“No, I just met him in the park and wanted to see if he was around, and for him to meet my friend,” Vince said with uncharacteristic politeness, offering a thumb in my direction. She looked a little perplexed or unsure what to do, but he kept talking. “He said come by anytime. We were talking in the park about the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. She relented finally, inviting us in, where we removed our shoes and followed her up the stairs.

When we reached the upstairs landing, we were in what I supposed was once a living room, it having since been converted into their meditation hall, an elabo-



rately decorated shrine room that reminded me of a catholic church, what with all the candles burning, incense wafting and its endless array of saints, or what they called ‘incarnated emanations of the Buddha,’ lining the walls. Opposite us was a huge bookshelf-like structure filled with literally thousands of small, golden Buddhas. The rest of the room was hung with numerous silk Tibetan tanka paintings of various other Buddhas. A large gold-trimmed wooden altar and throne sat at the head of the room, in a garden of statues and flowers, burning candles, incense, and offering bowls of rice and fruit. Before us, all across the floor, like waves in a sea,



were rows and rows of red and gold cushions for meditators. I’d assumed that all Buddhism was simple and unadorned like Zen, but this was like the catholic church all over again, and then some. There was something both comforting to me and vaguely threatening in that fact. I thought it rich and pretty, peaceful and warm—a sanctuary. But I remained wary of whatever belief system propped up all this beauty.

“Wait here,” the woman softly instructed us. We looked at the square cushions—the Tibetan version of a zafu I assumed—but not knowing how long we’d wait, and being in new surroundings besides, we remained standing, a little restless in the almost oppressive silence of the place, gawking at the decorations that Vince was now exclaiming as “fucking dope!”

Momentarily, the lama appeared, smiling. He was a diminutive little Tibetan



man, only around 30 or so years old, with a shaved head and robes of magenta and gold. He softly said hello and bowed his head quickly, before motioning us to follow him into what was ostensibly the center's library.

The lama gathered up his robes to carefully seat himself in a chair, and motioned us with a nod to sit in those opposite him, which Vince and I quickly plopped into.

Vince introduced me as "... his homosexual lover." I was mortified, having been thus outed against my will, and for the first time—and in front of a religious man no less. But I was also strangely flattered to have finally heard Vince refer to me as any kind of lover or boyfriend, though I realized he was probably only using it to discomfit the lama, which seemed, considering the circumstances and Vince's assessment of him, even more disrespectful than usual. I blushed.

But the lama just laughed, a sort of jubilant open-mouthed bark almost, which relieved me somewhat, but also made me more vexed as to how to act in front of him. He reached out to shake my hand heartily and I managed a tentative smile.

He liked Vince, he told me, and proceeded to ask him all sorts of personal questions about his money and job woes, his feelings about society and his family. He seemed to know a lot about Vince, but I thought they'd only met briefly. I was still recovering from Vince's introduction, but now I was beginning to wonder about just how long they'd actually talked that day in the park. They were going on and on about all sorts of things, like old friends. What would Vince steal *from him*, I wondered absently.

With no other recourse, I just listened. The lama, whose English was impeccable, displayed a combination of patience and lightness in talking to Vince, which was wholly unlike anyone else's reaction to him. I could see he took Vince seriously, but not what was happening to him, whereas Vince himself as well as everyone else seemed to do just the opposite. The lama didn't mock him or trivialize him, but he laughed at Vince's dramatic reports of injustice and paranoia. When Vince looked hurt, the lama would simply smile briefly and kindly, and then he'd get serious and say something like: "The activity of the world is empty and pointless. None of it matters Vince. None of it is what's in your heart. Your heart is the world that matters and that is real."

Vince would accept such answers, but I'm not so sure he'd agree. He didn't have that opinion of his heart or the world. He went on and on instead with his litany: he'd had it with the welfare office, they were worthless, having no desire to help anyone. Smiling again, Lama Tenzin agreed. "And that is the nature of the civil service. They are not the people who decided this generosity they dispense. They are



only the administrators of it, and as such are more interested in keeping it all in order than in helping anyone. You must understand intention Vince. You see, they aren't there to help you; that is not their intention, though there may be individuals who are there for that reason. But ultimately, they are there to execute certain duties, that's all. You shouldn't expect otherwise, though sometimes you may benefit from a kind person who works there."

"I disagree," Vince snapped.

"Please explain your position, Vincent," the lama calmly replied, calmly.

"They are paid to help me; to serve me. They don't do either of those things."

I remembered then one of his nuggets regarding me and the middle class: 'the worst thing about the middleclass is that they not only want, but expect, something for nothing.' I thought in that moment that every insult he'd ever hurled at me was really aimed at himself.

The lama continued: "Ask them next time you are there what they are paid for, Vincent. Ask them how they get promotions. I think you will find that it has little or nothing to do with love, which seems to be what you want from them."

"I want their money; I don't want their love," Vince said defensively, looking almost shocked at how the lama had called his bluff.

"You don't need either Vincent, but you do seek their love in your odd way. That is wholly natural; we all seek love. Good for you." Vince bristled and then looked confused, his brows scrunched up to frustration as if to say, 'What the fuck are you talking about?' But the lama was so disarming, it threw Vince off. 'My god, he's met his match,' I thought to myself, watching them spar back and forth like they were playing ping pong or tennis. "You tell me you want them to help you," the lama continued articulately, "and maybe they are helping you. I think they are. Vincent, remember what I said about nothing is as it seems. You are too suspicious of everything when you try too hard to understand it."

Vince just sighed. "Who fucking cares?" he said dolefully. I winced at his language, but the lama didn't. He seemed to find it almost endearing, smiling whenever I thought he should look offended or shocked.

"Exactly!" the lama now announced, grinning broadly and with complete self-assurance, sitting back as if to signal the lesson for today was over.

It was unbelievable to me. The lama had silenced Vincent Malone. And yet you couldn't say he'd beat him. He just kept kneading the dough of whatever it was until they reached a sort of stalemate where they agreed—or the source of Vince's trouble was once again laid bare. I suppose what the lama did that the rest of us



never could, was to stay with Vince, keep up with him and not react. It was all really just patience. Vince could be worn down too it appeared, or exhausted as the case might be. Or perhaps he really had met his match. Either way, I figured, this exchange is doomed. I looked at the lama then, almost as if to warn him that Vince would turn on him too, but the lama only put his hand on my back as he led us out, patting me softly, as if for encouragement.

“It was nice to meet you, Neill. Do come again,” And to Vince he added, curtly but kindly: “Pay attention, Vincent; pay close attention.”

We ended up arguing on the way home. We were so close to the hospital, nearly in its shadow, how could I not ask?

“When’s your next radiation appointment?”

He glared at me, but he answered sarcastically. “Well, as you can see, Neill, with all my metaphysical dilettantism and such, that I’m big into death, so why would I seek out hospitals?” I rolled my eyes, but he wasn’t going to let me off. He put his face in mine, “Huh, Neill, why would I fucking care about you and your little brother and all your cute little cancer adventures with your fucking family? Huh?”

“Leave them out of this, Vince.”

“Out of what, Neill? Our fucked-up relationship? I thought we were supposed to share everything, tell all our stories ...”. He was gesticulating like a cheerful lecturer now, while the bus crowd watched from down-turned faces and I kept my gaze averted, out the window. “In fact, why haven’t you invited me home for dinner?” I looked at him then. “Huh?” he snapped. “Huh, what’s the deal, Neill, don’t I rate?” I didn’t want to get into it there on the bus, but I was trapped.

“Vince,” and I looked at him as he looked smugly back at me. “Vince, you would never come if I invited you, you know that.”

“You couldn’t do it anyway, you’re a little closet case.” Then he shouted. “Hey everybody, look at the fuckin’ faggot!” Who’s like whose Dad, I thought then.

“You are a total asshole,” I stated then righteously, and pulled hard on the stop-request cable. And I *was* near tears this time, as I got up and brushed by him. He followed me off the bus of course, and we took the long walk home, all the time his half-contrite barking from behind filling my ears, while I contemplated whether I really wanted to have sex with him ever again.

When he caught up to me, he had that look on his face. “Neill, I went on the wrong day, and all hell broke loose, and I called the receptionist a fuckwad and that pretty much got me kicked out of there.”

“You’re a real charmer, Vince,” I answered him, but I felt like I no longer



cared.

“I’m effective. I love mistreating heterosexual women who think they can flirt their way through life. I’m their worst fucking nightmare.”

“And their cutest nightmare,” I added cynically.

“I’m not cute,” he stated matter-of-factly then.

I nodded my head. “No, of course not.” But by then he was already in the corner liquor store and I was stranded, resigned to wait outside. He was back in a jiffy, opening a package of gum with his teeth, a bottle visible in his pocket. Those places weren’t easy to steal from but he’d managed it with the time-worn, and as such, bold deception of buying some trivial little item like gum.

Back to the Baldwin we went to spackle over the cracks. I truly wasn’t that into it, and maybe he sensed that as we rolled and roiled on the lumpy little bed. With one great shove, he’d pushed me off and out of him, climbed out of bed and gotten dressed.

He’d never done that before. I’d always been careful with Vince. He was like a whirling dervish of boldness and fear both, and no place more so than when we were having sex. There were never words between us then, and so I learned to read the warnings that flashed across his eyes, cautioning me that any wrong move could turn me into his father, at which point he’d repel me, then embrace me desperately in rapid succession.

But the embrace did not come this time.

I knew it was his father. I’d waited for him. Now something had brought him back or triggered the domino effect of it. I hadn’t been paying attention or I hadn’t cared enough to keep track. Without looking at me now, he quickly grabbed his pack of Drum tobacco and matches, and went out into the hall and on down to the fire escape to smoke.

I don’t know what made me do it. I knew better than to confront him when he was in that dark mood. Maybe I just felt guilty and responsible for it having gone wrong. But I followed after him, hoping against all evidence that this time it would be different; that something would finally change. He glared at me when I approached him, and his furrowed brow said clearly, ‘stay away.’ I reached out for him anyway, as if to break his fall from the fire escape and hold him here; help him push through whatever had once again risen up to cut him off from me. But this wasn’t about a t-shirt, and an embrace was not what would bring him out of it. How could I really know what twisted like a snake through his mind at those times? I’d been arrogant to think I could.

He barked at me, and slapped my hand away, “How dare you touch me!” And



then he reached out with both of his hands in front of him, dropping the cigarette that sparked momentarily at his feet before descending six floors, and he pushed me hard against the doorframe.

I was momentarily shocked; even terrified, and every part of me felt like it was suddenly folding in, or as if the iron of the fire escape had fallen prey to metal fatigue and was now collapsing under us, from where we'd freefall down, down, ending up in the refuse pile of his stolen booty, cigarettes and paper plates far below in the alley. Vince was enormous then, enormous in his anger and in his raw animal fury. I saw fire all over him as the neon flashed, and raging dragons in his eyes

I stood there, every muscle in my body clenched, wholly paralyzed. I knew if I attempted any move he might send me away once and for all, if not attack me outright and throw me off the fire escape. And yet holding him was all I wanted to do, or could think to do. I couldn't very well walk away now. I felt, in fact, that if I turned from him now, he would not be there when I looked back for him. I felt stuck, and my eyes filled with tears for him, one little boy for another, reaching out for him and calling him toward me all at once, but only with my eyes. My body had lost its voice in the one place that belonged to it. And so I spoke words, chancing it all, in a place where no words had ever been uttered.

"Fuck me, Vince," I begged through my tears. He pushed me indoors and did just that. He was like a wrathful god then, one of those crazy tanka pictures from that disturbing Tibetan book of his I'd never read, with flames in his eyes and blood in his mouth; his cock like a reptile, its heartless tongue flipping in and out. He simply crushed me and I bled. He purposely hurt me, and when he was through, he was pale and shaking like he'd been earlier that day. And then he got dressed and left.

I laid there ruminating, dreading that something had changed alright and that perhaps he'd become a violent maniac from here on out. I told myself that I should get out while I still could. But I couldn't turn from him. I looked at the ceiling, stained as ever, making shapes now of it, remembering the old forgotten Virgin Marys I'd found in such places in my youth, and wondered as the tears came again, where is all this going? How did I get here? And why? But I had a vague idea, even if I didn't understand it completely. It was like some part of me that had been lost had been found when I saw him that day in the clinic waiting room. I knew if I left, I wouldn't just be leaving him; I'd be leaving something of myself; something of my better self.

I try to sort it out in my mind, breathing heavily, but all I really feel is like I miss Peter and I want to go home. So I got up then and packed my little gym bag, thinking of how we laughed, and how even when my mother was falling apart,



things never got as twisted as they did here with Vince.

And then he returned, and I saw his eyes, calm again. And in them I saw the part of me that had fought to save itself from that bourgeois sleep of a world that had never been my own, even though it was the only one I knew. I belonged here in the Baldwin with Vince, come what may. I put my bag back down and sat on the floor.

He went to the window to smoke and we sat there together in silence in that sad little room in that rundown residential hotel; and I understood suddenly that *this is it*—this is home. Because what was true and what was a lie was always very clear in Vince's eyes—you could see it there, almost yelling from beyond his pupils—truth, with a 'goddammit' tagged on for emphasis. His truth at least, but often mine too. Whoever he was, and for all his many flaws and poor technique, what looked out from deep within him always relentlessly, vigilantly challenged me to cut to the painful, raw core. I loved him for that. If for nothing else, I loved him for that because no one else had ever demanded the truth, and that was what I'd longed for. I knew now why I'd felt some satisfaction at Peter's scars, my mother's tears—it was the rawness of the love and honesty they demanded. It had taken an actual knife to cut to the core of what mattered between us. I'd needed to bleed too, and Vince is the knife, and I'll take the scar.

"Gonna go home, Neill?" A part of me wanted to still, but I said nothing. "None of that should have happened, Neill. You shouldn't have come out there on the fire escape. You gotta give me some space." I just sat there and listened, feeling he was a blessing and a curse both and I had to take the one with the other. "Sit down, here, Neill. I'm not gonna hurt you. Let me show you something." And out came his books.

We sat there on the floor, the sun streaming through the window during the one hour of morning that the sun reached his room. I watched those ever-present dust moats that always haunted this place or blessed it—or both, or neither. He sat indian-style, with a big copy of Jung's *Man and His Symbols* open to a beautiful picture of a Tibetan mandala, and he started exclaiming on it, sharing his insight and relating it to all the millions of other occult or metaphysical books he'd read. I didn't follow his reasoning, nor see the parallels, but I didn't need to—I was too distracted in fact with the real thing.

I just watched him, and I could see he was hounded by some nagging anxiety, among those countless thousands he rarely shares that claw at him from below—dragging him back to hell? —and he's doing what he does to stay above it, or elude its grasp. He's building a tower. All the time, brick by brick it grows like a big men-



tal edifice—a spiraling, dizzying minaret doomed to fall, with no foundation really but the chaos of his subconscious and the world around him where he gathers his bricks. And inside it, like magma, the pain is rising just as fast, so there's no time to waste. He must have built it a thousand times by now I think, those suicide attempts being the most deafening collapses; the furthest falls.

My eyes tear up because I can't seem to look at him now without feeling the full weight of him and everything that has made him this little bricklayer of ideas and theories, hopes and dreams, conflicts and despairs. He'll build it around himself and he'll build it around me too I suppose. Which makes of it a tomb. I love him surely, but that doesn't mean I believe in what he's doing. I don't.

He stops mid-sentence when he looks up and sees my tears. "What the fuck? Don't suck me into that!" I've angered him of course, and though it smarts, how could I have expected otherwise? I've interrupted the construction. He'll smooth it all over by changing the subject, but he won't cry. Vince never cries—the tower would melt. He believes in the psychologists' assessment that depression is anger unexpressed, and he's happy to cut it off at the pass with his fury and rage. But I'm not crying tears of depression. Albeit, they are sad tears, they are tears of love. You can't expect those from Vince either. He couldn't take that chance.

"Don't fucking whine to me," he says with disgust, "I don't pity anyone." I thought then how he sounded like all the rightwing politicians he was forever condemning, but why remind Vince of his inconsistencies and contradictions? Such a criticism would be just another wrecking ball to his tower and he'd have none of it. I realized then that he had a lot more to lose than I'd ever thought he had—which made me only more tearful. And so I excused myself and went away.

"Where the fuck are you going?" he calls down the hall.

"I'll be back," I manage to say. "I'm just going down to the store for a minute." He believes me, knowing that I know better than to lie to him by now.

"You have nowhere else to go!" he shouts as I clamor into the elevator. I think to myself, 'true,' and 'shame on you, Vince, for saying it.'

As I ride the rickety elevator down, I think sadly that another moment of connection has been lost. Oh, and how many there have been. I think to get in the car and go, but where to? I'll wander in limbo. What better place to fill the role than this skidrow? I opt for silent self-pity, walking the streets in the hope that I can spend my tears and thus save him the bother of them. I stand and watch the passed-out drunks; the muttering schizophrenics; the scamming immigrant kids and runaways, forever scheming how next to score; the tired-looking prostitutes and their heartless pimps. And I don't feel lucky this time.



I only know one way. The body is the way to reach him. So I go to the corner liquor store and I buy a bottle of scotch and up I go, back to the 6th floor.

I knock at his door, and he opens it a crack and then completely, contrite and pulling me in. And he's all over me and we make love again quickly and fall off to sleep.

And then he wakes me up in the middle of the night, shaking me by the shoulder like a kid, like there's an earthquake or a fire or something; like it couldn't possibly wait.

Blurry-eyed, I muttered: "What?"

His eyes shown weirdly young and innocent, and he said: "I love you, you know. I really love you." I squinted and pushed myself up on one elbow, just as he rolled over away from me and closed his eyes again. Had he been dreaming? Had I? I nudged him, but there was no response. I knew he'd never cop to it. But he had. And in the deepest dark of night. He'd copped to love.



Sven Davisson

SH

Polymorphous Blue Chat

Vivek Anand

The name is Krishna. Password Radha. She is my entry to Godhood. He is I am. Om. So this desire comes over me, late evenings, sticky afternoons. And Brindavan beckons. How much more paper can I push around? How long can the yellow trace be torn awkwardly? How many evenings am I going to wait for the fucker to call? I log on.

There's this guy. Always is? This one isn't Irish. Or is he? Indian. ABCD? IBARCD. Jewish?? Portuguese Italian German. The cows are Jersey. The bell is Tibetan. The incense Japanese. Krishna goes diasporic. Hell yeah! Have gopis will travel. What everrrr.

His name protects me. Sort of. Weeds out the totally clueless guys. The suspicious ones get over their hang-ups soon enough. I try to remain worthy of his name. Show my lovers a glimpse of his form. See him in the knots in their shoulders. Watch my reflection in their eyes. Some of them are lost souls. Devotees come in all forms. And sizes. How can I but love them, though? There is this thirst called love and I cause it, quench it, bathe in it, shower it, milk it, and uncover it.

He will quench my thirst, won't he? He will hide my clothes, won't he? Will he?

I asked Krishna if I could leave him one evening to go suck dick. He was offended. Wanted to come along. I had



the time of my life and the new boy said that I was the hottest thing he'd seen in at least a week. Boys...! Little did he know. It wasn't me he drooled over. Came under. I was only a channel for the hottest thing this side of the Jamuna. Or that, for that matter. And Krishna knows how to kiss a man. And play a flute.

Radha likes to ride. And stain white bed sheets with her red feet. While she milks skillfully. She is wasted on some amateurs. Has to make do with the boys she bumps into on the way to the forest. Hell, some of them aren't even cowherds. Krishna is away. Usually is. But he misses her. And her skills. She knows. He'll come back. Some yuga.

I love watching them make love and me. If there ever was a perfect union it was here. If there ever is a perfect separation it is here. Ever so often one of their hands will wander and fondle me. My humble lips will bruise the skin of his blue neck. My teeth will mark her breast. And I will become her. He will allow me to become him. And I will taste butter. If ever there will be a perfect adoration it will be here. In this valley. Brindavan is streaming video. And I will download.

"Hare! Hare!" The boys love seeing me enter their room.
 "Loved Monsoon Wedding!" "I knew God was gay."
 "Hey, Shiva's in SF Castro! You should say hullo."
 "Wassup Kris?"

Kris! My Krishna worshiping grandmother would need a Coca Cola. ☺

I sat up with her one night, waiting for Krishna to be born. While my brothers waited for my parents' plane to land. They were late coming in, driving home, and the two of us fell asleep. I woke up a half hour late and didn't



have the heart to tell her that we'd missed the star. Sorry, wrong god. That we'd missed the moment he was born to Devaki and Vasudev in Uncle Kansa's prison. I told her that it would be time in five minutes. We uncovered the fruit. Tidied up the skirts on the sacred stones and especially on the vaguely anthropomorphic one with the big silver eye dressed up as the baby Krishna tonight. And then we sang. It rained the next day. Always does. "So that Yashoda maiyya can wash his diapers!" she used to say. We sang. Loud enough to make up for the absence of other devotees.

Rang that bell to tell the world that a boy cute as hell had been born, had entered the room and that everybody had better look out. They knew. We all know. And we come back for more. Or wait for him to.

It's a quiet room tonight.

"Night, guys! Laundry beckons. "

"Bye Krishna."

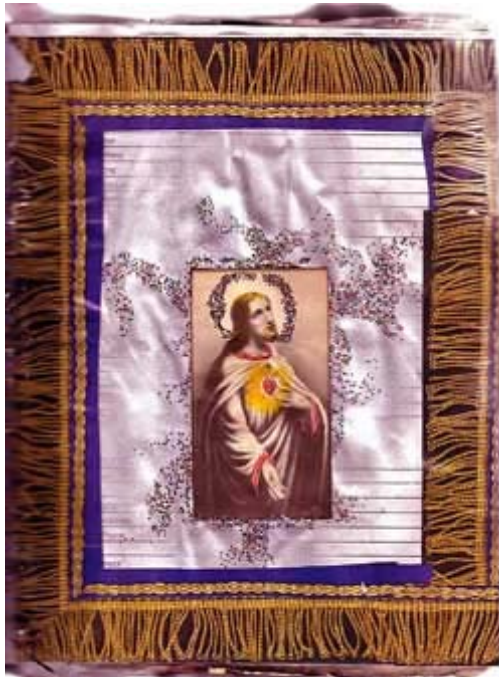
Krishna has to wash his own diapers in America. The lovers will just have to wait.

May 14, 2002



The Epiphany School

Jim Provenzano



Jim Provenzano

I wear a cap from the Epiphany School.
I've been there.

Not the actual school in New Jersey. I found it in a pile of lost garments in search of new homes at a local Salvation Army, among the fabric of the insignificant; insignificant unless you have faith in the reincarnation of value in certain objects. I do.

By the time my parents moved us from New York City for Ohio's pastures, they had lost interest in carrying on the tortures of catechism. The only Catholic Church in that small town sat across the street from our junior high school.

I don't blame my parents for this shift in direction and roots. Returning to New York for holidays and visits gave it a special value. Being from a big city offered an exoticism the farm kids appreciated.

One Easter visit back to New York, our family trekked first through New England. We ate egg bread and stayed in colonial hotels. The title song from *Jesus Christ Superstar* played on the AM radio. My brother and sister would beg for Mom to turn up the volume as we chair-danced like holy Supremes.

I've lost most of the souvenirs; the eraser from Plymouth Rock, tree bark from Emily Dickinson's yard, the etching of the Witch House from Salem. The House of

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Seven Gables offered a strange enchanting comfort.

Ending up at the prim Long Island home of my godparents, by Sunday I cried in a panic, hiding in the upstairs bedroom when it was deemed that I should accompany Uncle Jim to mass. I whimpered, begging mom not to make me go.

Was it the idea of going to church with the looming strict older man that frightened me, his white hair so different from my father's? Or was it the fear that going into a church would expose me for the sort of creature that even at twelve I knew that building was built to cast out? Did I fear the rituals, of being proven un-Catholic? Would the wine and wafer explode at the touch of a homosexual boy more comfortable in the home of Salem ghosts?

My fears proved unfounded when my brother later returned with a palm leaf, fanning it at me like a souvenir of his bravery. Churches were an amusement park to him.

My uncle never spoke of it, but each subsequent visit, I felt sure that with me he had a little lost demon clinging to the last branch of his family tree.

The Catholic folk in Ohio were as ethnic as a Jell-O mold, but they enjoyed our gestures of culture. Soon after our invasion from the Far East, Mom's shopping acquaintances marveled at her finesse in finally goading the A&P butcher to stock Italian sausage. Bagels came later.

I could have become a full-fledged Catholic, more than absentee. We were allowed to shop. My sister became a Presbyterian for purely political purposes. My brother chose movies. I wavered, and in my indecision, the nature of a capricious god was revealed in three separate, seemingly non-religious experiences, but what I call my epiphanies.

Pestered by the ranks of born-again Christians, Catholicism retained a distant appeal. They didn't advertise, and were the only flock willing to loan their basement meeting hall for the annual two-hour sex talk to the entire male population of our seventh-grade class, hosted by my own doctor (also the county coroner), and accompanied by a film showing a man having an ejaculation. Actually it was just a cartoon showing a side anatomical view of a man. The point



is, it was the Catholic Church that made me feel good about sex, and its possibility, for the first time. Hearing Brian Deacon ask my doctor, in front of the entire audience of boys, why his “come shoots so far” also provided sacred memories. I had reason to give thanks.

I went to church services only at the invitation of handsome blond boys. Why it worked that way still fascinates me. It took lust to get me into the house of the lord. It took logic to keep me out.

Howie Fitz was the only Catholic boy on our block and being a smart kid who preferred board games to kickball, my best friend by default. I attended Christmas mass with him for three years. He came home later than public school kids. I’d sit on our porch, watch him walk up the hill toward our shared apartment building that resembled a post-fab Tara.

His black tie askew, his white button-down shirt tugged out of his dress pants, he seemed exhausted by his school’s rigors. Of course, he never played in his school clothes, so I often accompanied him to his bedroom. Why do you think I waited a half hour? To a twelve-year-old, a half hour is a long time.

Once, early in our friendship, as he changed clothes, he asked me to strip down to my shorts as well. This one-time unveiling of our genitalia-in-progress revealed that at even such a young age, his gifts superceded any other boy. His body was golden in the afternoon sun as it spilled through a window.

My First Epiphany shone in the light fuzz on his skin and the flesh that prodded up and out of it, straining to be caressed. My touches were brief and precious, but the seed of desire had been planted.

Howie became an ardent heterosexual by high school. I’d come to terms with alternating the roles of theatre stud and successful masquerading dater of cheerleaders who didn’t want sex. That left me off the hook. Passion remained on a low boil, until I was paired up in choir next to a shaggier, toughened blond, Luke Moore.

After conspiring to perform the Glimmer commercial from *Saturday Night Live* at that year’s talent show (“It’s a floor wax and a dessert topping!”), we hit it off and



became pals. Eventually, between evenings spent smoking pot while trailing the county back roads, Luke invited me to worship, but not exactly in the way I'd hoped to worship him.

Singing in church (Lutheran this time) gave us more time to play off each other's harmonic talents. We blind-read hymns, outdoing each other on baritone to tenor jumps. He even got me high once before services. Occasionally a few other parishioners gave us a glance, but we hoped it was simply to marvel at our singing.

Luke worked weekends at a lumber mill. One day a log fell on him and broke his leg. I'd been sent to drive his Jeep from work to his home and leave the car keys in his room. I was supposed to walk home, but with his family at the hospital, I crept silently into his bedroom to see my birthday card to him still sitting on his bureau, and in the drawer below, a stack of fresh Jockey shorts.

This was at the same time a group of kids called the God Squad (or G-Force) were slipping little Chick Christian comics into the slats of kids' lockers whom they considered salvageable. When the little pamphlets fell out as I opened my locker, my reaction usually shifted from disgust to dismay to worry to paranoia. Were they watching? Did they know how or why I sinned in their eyes? Who could believe such baloney, or that a cartoon would change a mind or soul?

Luke laughed as I presented a small cluster of them as a hospital room gift. How an ex-jock and pot head could still believe in Jesus and get to church every Sunday after a night of debauchery, pissing away six-packs of beer on rural offroads seemed more of a statement of his stamina than inconsistency.

Although I found excuses to discontinue my church going, we stayed friends. We became better friends when I became his aide and escort through his leg cast limitations. He never pushed the religious stuff. I think he realized I worshipped him for his beauty, his casual machismo. He suggested I ignore the God Squad, since they were only "trying to get brownie points at their Youth Group for bringing in new converts."

My epiphany with Luke occurred while we were singing in the choir, a day when I was not wearing my own Jockey shorts, but his. Our effete choir director ended up giving the duet to two other boys, including a delinquent tenor who kept his legs



wide open through practices. Sitting with no desks helped display rows of male talent in those corduroy bell-bottom days.

But Luke and I didn't waste a moment deciding to do our best despite our chances. Having practices the weekend before, drunk and stoned on a cow pasture under a moonlit night, we stood together by the piano the next Monday, opened our throats, singing in a comfortable intimacy only achieved by certain married couples.

The choir was silent. Like my First Epiphany, which merely revealed the possibility of gay sex, the Second revealed the potential for a love that grows beyond sex. Luke and I never spoke of our unrequited lust, but at that moment, I loved him, and without announcing it, all the inhabitants of my small world had the truth sung to them.

A family comment goes like this: if we'd been a religious family, stayed Catholic and remained in New York, I'd probably be a Jesuit priest. Not a pretty picture, but it is the only comparison that fits my life now, without the catechism. I fight demons, but unlike Father Carras in *The Exorcist*, the demons come from within the Catholic Church itself, and not in the body of a little girl.

Considering the history of atrocities committed by vindictive men in skirts, from the pontiff on down, it's amazing that such erotic gifts came to me through religion.

My Third, and for now, final Epiphany, was not a sole act. It had been preceded by months of preparation, and inspired by not one blond, but a roomful of handsome men, few blond, all innocent.

Pummeled into adulthood after returning to the city of my birth, I found myself backed into a corner with a few thousand others, forced into a state of viral war with the government and its conspirator, the Mother Church.

The day before my last Epiphany, I purchased a Jesus Christ T-shirt with his face inked in fluorescent green. When I mentioned, at point of purchase to the Chelsea clerk, that I planned to wear it at St. Patrick's Cathedral the next day, he gasped, grabbed a pair of plastic rosary beads with a glow-in-the-dark Virgin Mary dangling at the end. "Accessories make the martyr!"



The morning we were ushered into the cathedral following the bomb check (such was the trust and love of the New York Archdiocese), about five thousand others congregated outside under less pleasant circumstances. While they smashed themselves against barricades on that freezing December morning, I sang a few hymns in a crowded pew, thinking of Howie and Luke. I listened and watched the wall of priests in white, guarding the sacristy like a football team in raiment, finally face to face with the Varsity God Squad.

I felt, for perhaps the first time since that New England back seat AM radio singing, the full love of Jesus pulse through my veins as I awaited the cue - two minutes into Cardinal O'Connor's homily - stood, ripped open my suit and shirt to reveal the Jesus T-shirt and dangling Virgin rosary. It did sort of glow in the dim light.

I fell on cue, pondering the cool marble as the brothers and sisters of my affinity group, the Order of the Carmelites, lay sprawled down the length of the aisle. I felt secure in knowing that I could answer to this action at the very gates of heaven, especially when I saw the venom in the eyes of the altar boy tossing trespass advisories as he tromped his skirted frame down the body-strewn aisle, a fairy Death swathing a re-enacted Mi Lai pit.

The chorus ended a hallelujah at the rear arch of the cathedral. The fact that I was also being led out on a stretcher was beside the point. The final "Amen" echoed through the church as the arch passed over my head. I had disrupted the altar of decadent hypocrisy. I had made my point and knew someone was listening, including CNN, ABC and the *New York Times*.

Beyond furtive lust, beyond the longing for love, my secret love of sacred art and architecture, music and pageantry had been fulfilled. One of 111 lambs in the last great gesture of ACT UP's epoch, the resounding action would rattle the burbling comments of blathering politicians the world over. Every grand gesture of my life aimed at nay-saying the corruption among the robed ranks had led up to this simple



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Jim Provenzano

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act, laying down in a cold marble cathedral, finding an unruly consensus.

The throng of outside protestors hosannah-ed us from behind the barricades. I would have offered a papal wave, had I not been handcuffed. As I walked to the paddy wagon, Jesus smiled on me. The moneychangers had not been swept out, but they had been given a good rinse.

Years later, even some of the most conservative among gay faithful, who had vilified our “sacrilege,” would re-enact the same ritual of protest as the widely known sexual scandals of the Catholic hierarchy came to light.

It was at some photo shoot afterward, a sort of reunion of a few Stop the Church survivors, that I found the cap. That’s me, in between my courtroom peanut gallery of pals; David Feinberg, Diamanda Galas. I’m wearing the Epiphany School cap.

What saddens me is that I could never share my most religious experience with my uncle. Mom said, “It would kill him.” She merrily videotaped the news stories about it, but never mentioned to my uncle that I had been involved.

A year later, he died on January 6, the date of the Epiphany, when the Magi visited the Christ child in his manger. In his will, this childless man, who had smartly invested in Boeing since the 1950s, also invested in me.

I tried to mourn him, but too many friends half his age had been taken ahead of him.

Gone are the rapturous unfoldings of bedding to peek at sleepover friends’ bodies. Instead, we peek into coffins to survey the make-up job. Gone are the furtive first dates, the giggling group sex in hotel rooms at out-of-town demos.

Instead, I scan the TV as a friend I’m in love with critiques his latest drug trial long distance over the phone. I crayon a halo around his blond head in a photo I have of him, shirtless, still muscular, still healthy-looking.

I don’t want another Epiphany, the one in which I hold his frail body, transferring it to a gurney, an IV Pieta. I don’t need another of that kind of epiphany, thank you. I’ve already got the hat.



Write and Find Ecstasy In Writing

part one

Mogg Morgan

The repeal of the witchcraft act and the explosion of occult publishing

1951, the year in which the Witchcraft Act was finally repealed, was certainly pivotal in the development of occult publishing. Paper rationing had ended two years previously and this set the stage for a growth of book publishing and enabled newer players to enter the industry. But it was older more established small independent publishing houses that became the real pioneers.

Gerald B. Gardner



In 1951 G B Gardner, under the pen name ‘Scire’, published an historical novel, written in 1949 and entitled *High Magic’s Aid*. Still labouring in what he called ‘the guise of fiction’; Gardner was nevertheless later to claim that his novel was, as far as he knew, the ‘first book written by an initiated witch describing . . . something of what a witch believes.’ (quoted from *The Meaning of Witchcraft* - G B Gardner’s 1959 book for Aquarian Press.)

It took a couple more years until in 1954 for Gardner felt secure enough able to drop the disguise and come out as a witch - well almost. He wrote of his book *Witchcraft Today* that it was: ‘the first book [as opposed to novel] ever written describing what witches are and what they do, by someone who had actually taken part in their ceremonies, worshipped their Gods with them and made magic with them.’ (Gardner, 1959, p. 275)

Gardner undoubtedly was right about the dangers and obstacles to this kind of ‘confessional’ writing. He makes a point of mentioning in the same chronology



‘The August number of *Fate* magazine (American edition) which carried a story of how, on July 3rd 1955 in Ojinaga, Mexico, eighty-five miles from Alpine Texas, a woman named Josephina Arista was publicly burned at the stake as a witch, without trial, upon the orders of a local priest, carried out by the alcalde and the city police.’(Gardner, , p. 75)

Gardner’s contention that the 1954 publication *Witchcraft Today* was a groundbreaker is almost certainly true. Nothing like it, certainly in the pagan/witchcraft genre had previously appeared. Authors of previous works, for example the widely quoted Christina Hole,(Hole, 1945) were essentially works of scholarly folklore. Christina Hole certainly had no broom in her closet. But her works were widely read by contemporary practitioners and were often cited, as for example the bibliography of Doreen Valienti’s first book *Where Witchcraft Lives* (Published by Aquarian in 1962). Christina Hole’s was first and foremost a historian and folklorist and therefore immune from any possible strictures under the Witchcraft Act.

Up until 1951 it was pretty much obligatory that author’s adopt a fairly hostile attitude to the subject of witchcraft: For example Christina Hole’s 1945 book, *Witchcraft in England* ends with the following valedictory:

‘When that faith sank, the witch and his craft dwindled to a mere survival from the past; and today, though witchcraft lives on it is no longer a terror even to those who believe in it, (she obviously didn’t know Maxim Sanders!), and has ceased to throw a dark shadow over any of our lives.’(Hole, 1945,p. 160)

A few years later and in another of her books published after the repeal of the act Hole’s tone is still fairly hostile

‘Reports appear occasionally in the newspapers of the unpleasant activities of secret societies practising the more evil forms of ritual magick.’

The author goes on to give the full transcript of some of these reports; One of these concerns a supposed ritual murder in 1945 at Lower Quinton, a stone’s throw from the Rollright Stones. This story continually resurfaced in 1954, after the repeal of the act and was given the big treatment by the Daily Mirror on the ninth anniversary of the still unsolved slaying - February 13th 1954.

VIII. MURDER AT LOWER QUINTON, 1945

Daily Mirror, February 13th, 1954



Ask in these parts whether seventy-four-year-old Charles Walton, murdered in a hedgerow here nine years ago on Sunday, was the victim of witchcraft, and even the detectives no longer smile.

For I can reveal that new clues and strange coincidences in this unsolved crime have recently come to light. And the idea that Walton was a twentieth-century sacrifice to black magic is no longer a joke in this Warwickshire hamlet.

At the time it seemed quite a commonplace murder. Walton, a hedger, was found with his throat slashed, beneath the hedge he had been trimming. 'Just find the motive and you find the killer,' thought the police.

But whispers of black magic trickled round the cottages of Lower Quinton almost as soon as Superintendent Alex Spooner, chief of Warwickshire C.I.D., and Superintendent Bob Fabian of The Yard started their enquiries.

The gossip about 'witchcraft' and 'a ritual killing' tickled the detectives. They smiled politely. That was nine years ago on Sunday-St Valentine's Day.

The killer of Charles Walton is still untraced. And today the detectives won't mock the word 'witchcraft'.

MURDER

Although Superintendent Fabian, who spent three months in the village, has retired, his colleague, Superintendent Spooner, has never admitted defeat on the case. Not once has he stopped inquiring. But what facts are there to go on?

First, picture Charles Walton on St Valentine's Day, 1945. The sun was unusually kind for February. It dappled the lanes and fields. Old Charles had a contract to cut the hedges of a local farmer and this was the sort of day his rheumatism would let him work. With his two-pronged hayfork and a razor-sharp hedge-slasher he hobbled from his thatched cottage. He had left his purse containing the little money he possessed at home-Charles Walton didn't believe in carrying money with him. Everyone knew that. At six o'clock, when he was overdue for his tea, his niece raised the alarm. He was found soon afterwards, dead since about noon.

Those are the facts. Now here are some of the coincidences that have come to light.

The Date. According to the old-time calendar, which is thirteen days behind the



present one, the killing took place on February I -the eve of a traditional sacrificial day. On that day a human being was killed in the belief that his life blood dripping into the ground would replace the fertility taken from the soil by the previous season's crops. (1)

The Method. The killer first threw the frail old man to the ground and then, before slashing him, pinioned him by the neck with the two prongs of his hayfork. Then the fork haft was forced over and wedged at an angle-almost as 'though to make certain that his blood would flow to the ground.

The Previous Murder. In 1875 at Long Compton, only a day's tramp across the Cotswold foothills, eighty-year-old Ann Ten-nant was the victim of one of the last known witch killings. She was killed with a two-pronged hayfork.

The police have found one other link between the killings, but I am pledged not to reveal it.

The Dog. Studying books on local superstitions and folklore, detectives have found reference to the 'visions' of a local boy of about fifteen who claimed that he saw headless dogs. That was about sixty years before the murder. The boy's name was Charles Walton. Since old Charles died there has been one other 'murder' on the slopes of historic Meon Hill, where he was found. The victim was a dog. The animal had been strangled by its collar as it struggled to free itself after being hung on a branch of a tree near the murder spot.

The Motive. Though Walton was a bit 'short-tempered', no one held a grudge against him. His only possession unaccounted for was a silver pocket-watch, but there is no proof that he carried it with him that day.

Like Superintendent Spooner-the man who says, 'I will solve this murder yet', but who is left with only one likely motive-I too have made many trips to the hamlet. But at my first mention of the word 'witchcraft', doors have been slammed in my face.

The killer has yet to be found. And that day may be nearer than he-or she-thinks.

This newspaper quoted verbatim in Christina Hole's book with the added footnote from Dr Margaret Murray saying that the Sabbats of the witch-cult were held on Candlemas Day, May-day Eve, Lammas Day, and All Hallow's Eve. (Murray, 1933)



Although Murray contributed a preface to Gardner's 1954 book, they later fell out because of the way she continued to give credibility to stories of the kind quoted above. Stories such as these recorded above provoked Gardner and 'the witches of England' to publish to try to set the record straight. Thus Gardner writes:

'I have been told by witches in England: "Write and tell people we are not perverts. We are decent people, we only want to be left alone, but there are certain secrets that you mustn't give away.' So after some argument as to exactly what I must not reveal, I am permitted to tell much that has never before been made public concerning their beliefs, their rituals and their reasons for what they do; also to emphasise that neither their present beliefs, rituals nor practices are harmful.'(Gardner, 1954, p. 13)

We can see in this that Gardner is still being a bit coy about his connection with witchcraft. He poses as an anthropologist and proprietor of a museum, also founded in 1951. This was the normal way of all occult publishing before this time. For example Francis Barrett's, author of the *The Magus* (1801) a classic of Georgian alchemy and occultism, is careful to distance himself as merely an observer of certain practices. And this was always the way. The only real exception to this comes in the work of Aleister Crowley from about 1904 onwards. But Crowley, as in many other things is a bit of a one off.

So its maybe not so unusual that writing in 1954 Gardner is very coy and doesn't really come out as a witch. Being a witch, as Gardner was only too aware, could still be a dangerous thing to admit in the climate of the time. Gardner knew Crowley and his career quite well. Gardner had seen at close quarters the consequences to ones reputation of the wrong stuff getting to the press. Bran, who is someone who was around at the time, thought that the repeal of the act was not really motivated by any libertarian aims of the Lord Chancellor but more as the clearance of obstacles to effective prosecution of other crimes. Another example quoted by Christina Hole shows the sort of farcical incidents that could, given the state of the law before the 1950's, find there way into the courts:

News Chronicle, January 6th 1947

Gordon Sutton, an Army pensioner of East Dereham, Norfolk, told Dereham magistrates that his neighbour, Mrs Spinks, an old age pensioner, had practised witchcraft on him.



He was summoned for assaulting Mrs Spinks. Both were bound over for six months. Sutton declared: 'A witch has been in the witness box. Many a time she tied a bunch of flowers on my front gate and I have spat on them and thrown them away. (Hole adds in a scholarly footnote: 'Spitting is a very ancient protective charm. Human spittle from time immemorial has been supposed to have magical powers and to be a defence against evil') (The report continues) You know that is going back to the witchcraft of the Dark Ages. I dare not tell you half the terrible things she has done to me. I have been tortured for five years.' [Shades of Nora Batty] Mrs Spinks, who denied she had practised witchcraft, said the trouble was due to her gathering parsley which Sutton wrongly said was in his garden.' (Hole, 1945, p. 106)

What of the publishers? Michael Houghton, the proprietor of the famous Atlantis bookshop in Museum Street, London, published Gardner's 1949 novel. But by 1954 he had managed to persuade a much larger and well-established company called Rider to take him on. Gardner says he had to be confessional or reveal something new or they would not have been interested. Ring of truth there. It's difficult to ascertain whether the repeal of the Witchcraft Act would have played any role in the publisher's deliberations. Fifty years later and the tracks have gone cold. Rider is now part of global media giant Bertelsmann, absorbed into its UK division Random House. Small presses like to delude themselves that being bought out by a big corporation is some sort of belated compliment to their editorial taste and acumen as publishers. Sadly this is not the case, it's the backlist the predator craves and has very little sentimental attachments to the entity itself. Rider becomes just another imprint amongst many others. I'm currently awaiting a response from Random house as to whether they have any archived materials of Rider in the 1950s.

Despite these gaps in the record I think it is a reasonable assumption that the legal eagles at Rider would have questioned such a publishing project. They would have asked Gardner's opinion; they may perversely have liked the prospect of a fight. More likely they would have gone for the publishing maxim 'Lets take a risk and turn it down.'

Afterall at the time other writers were experiencing censorship problems. I'm thinking of Rosaleen Norton in Australia or Mervin Peak in the UK. Vindictive Christians may well have initiated an action if only to put a spanner in the works. After all, fifty years earlier Madras Christian newspapers, with an eye on



‘market share’ had pretty much destroyed Helena Blavatsky’s reputation.

1951 was also important in other ways. The celebrated Aquarian Press seems to have been founded in that year, with an output of fairly uncontroversial spiritualist books. Titles such as Arthur Bhaduris’s *The Key to Health*, Gilbert Alice’s *Telepathy for you: to Mr and Mrs Everyman*, Bromage Benard’s *The Occult arts of ancient Egypt*; Daphne Viger’s *Atlantis Rising*; Marian Emma Slater’s *The Stars at Christmas*, Vera W Reid’s *The Silver Unicorn*. I wonder whose heard of any of these titles nowadays?

It wasn’t until 1959 that Aquarian as it were ‘moved over’ and published Gardner’s *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, a follow up to the 1954 *Witchcraft Today*. And in 1962 Aquarian published Doreen Valenti’s first little offering *Where Witchcraft Lives*.

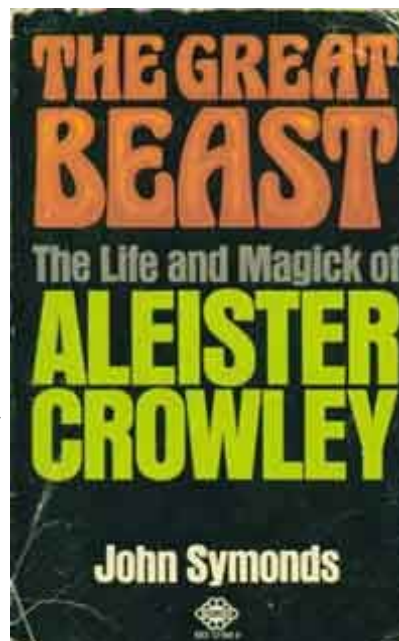
What of Hale, well known publishers of *Eight Sabbats for Witches* etc – did they play any part in the 1951 breakthrough? Sadly not. A long established company they came later on the scene. It was not until the late sixties and seventies that they really jumped on the bandwagon. Before that their output was mainly of the pre-repal folkloric variety, such as Ronald Seth’s study of the seventeenth century witchcraft trials *Children against Witches* Eric Maple *The Dark world of Witches* (1962) Ruth St Legers-Gordon’s *The Witchcraft and Folklore of Dartmoor*. Or in 1972 Luran Paines’ *Sex in Witchcraft*. You might ask which book was first out after the repeal of the act? I have to tell you it as John Symonds first version of *The Great Beast: the life of Aleister Crowley* (also published by Rider). The Bodleian pressmark says 20 November 1951. This is probably the most radical book of the times and one that as we shall discuss below. It was a time bomb that finally blew in the sixties.

‘The head of the OTO at the time, Karl Germer was shocked when he read *The Great Beast*. The Order of Oriental Templars (or Order of the Templars of the East) is a small international body of adepts who practice sexual magic. Germer said that the book would set the Order back a thousand years. He was mistaken. There is no doubt that the widespread interest today (1973) in Aleister Crowley stems from *The Great Beast*. (Preface to 1979 edition of *The Great Beast*)’

Symonds is certainly right that it did no such thing, the very opposite in truth. Its interesting that the book has gone through many incarnations and rewrites and its in the words of Colin Wilson ‘a kind of appalling classic’ (on dust-jacket of 1989 reprint as *The King of the Shadow Realm: Aleister Crowley: his life and*



magic). Did the 1951 act have any effect on the publication of this book? Yes I think it did, notice that there is no mention of magick on the cover of the first edition. Symonds says in another edition that at the time this sort of things couldn't be too obviously cited on the cover and that in later works he was able to add more of the sexual magick stuff. Indeed the more magical material was not published until 1958 and then by another publisher called Mullers, whose output also included the books of Crowley's disciple Kenneth Grant. It was not until 1973 that a complete revised edition of the Great Beast appeared in various cheap paperback editions licensed by Duckworth.



Symonds biography *The Great Beast* has never been popular with occultists although its impact on popular culture has been, in my opinion, immense. I remember reading one of the shlock horror editions given to me by a climbing friend. I must say I found the book a revelation, as did countless others. Since then other more 'sympathetic' writers have tried their hand at writing a more 'sympathetic' biography but few have really matched Symond's panache. When Cecil Williamson, the owner of the witchcraft museum read it, it was a revelation and he immediately decided he needed to know more about the subject.

Returning to Gardner's publishing efforts, one might ask what was his motivation in publishing his confessional books such as *Witchcraft Today*? Recent research shows that the publication of coven secrets earned him no friends amongst his initiators. Maybe they thought it better that witchcraft remain a largely secret tradition.

I contend that Gardner may well have seen the publication of *Witchcraft Today* as a magical act. Yes it would be good for his ego, what author doesn't crave the kind of recognition that the publication of a book brings? But his motivation goes further than this. Through the publication of the book he sets in motion a revival or re-creation of a cult that was up until this point largely moribund.



It could also be said that he open the flood gates for a kind of ‘confessional’ writing about witchcraft. Accounts by living practitioners of witchcraft were pretty much non existent before this time. As I said most books were either heavily disguised accounts posed in the form of a novel or semi scholarly accounts often quite hostile or distant from the tradition they describe.

Gardner deserves recognition as a pioneer who started a trend that in later years would lead to the growth of a new kind of occult literature. The massive increase in this area of publishing is in the main in books by self confessed practitioners, developing or revealing the secrets of their art. That’s quite an achievement. Familiar images of the occult, such as those shown in the following montage, would have been impossible without him. In a future article I hope to follow further the long associations between writing, publishing and magick.

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Write and Find Ecstasy In Writing

part two

Mogg Morgan

Writing and words have always had a long association with magick. Some would contend that writing is the invention of magicians. In ancient Egypt the hieroglyphic script seems to have a distinct moment of creation. Their use was to record accurately magical and religious texts. The earliest function of writing is as an instrument for the public reading, aloud of magical or religious formulae. It was only later in the Greek and Roman world that reading began its long development as a medium for silent and private reading of an author's text.

Witches and magicians are more than any other the people of the book. I know this phrase is usually reserved for devotees of the Abrahamic tradition. But we are the true people of the book - lots of books. Books, reading and the text have always been a crucial part of magical practice. Let me remind you of the phrase Bell Book and candle. Remind yourself for a moment of these concepts so familiar:

Grimoires - or grammars of magick;
 The Books of Shadows;
 Spells.
 Talisma, eating your words as in late hermetic practice
 Libers.

The Great Beast is also a good example of a Liber. The Liber has been especially important to the magicians of all times. A Liber is magical book written at the behest of a discarnate entity or spirit. Aleister Crowley wrote lots of these including the monumental master work *Magick in Theory and Practice*. More correctly entitled *Liber ABA* - Aba / father or by simple cabalistic numerology ABA = 4, book four. Four being a significant number in occult symbolism

Liber ABA or *Magick* grew out of a magical working between Crowley and his scarlet woman of the time, Sor Virakam otherwise known as Mary Desti. The working spirit that made itself known to the pair was called Abuldiz, hence the working is sometimes called the Abuldiz working. The final book was issued in the



form of a square of four equal sides priced at four groats (shillings).

The book is in four parts, part II for example deals with the fundamentals of ceremonial magick. Crowley exhorts the reader to magical endeavour in brisk prose on the grounds of common sense and practical psychology.

Lawrence Sutin, a gifted modern biographer of both Philip K Dick and Crowley says that Magick was a radical break from the veiling, sanctimonious tone that had dominated writing on magick since the Romantic period. Crowley followed on the basic approach set forth in his 1903 essay 'An Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic'. That is, he argued for magic as a structured, empirical means for developing unrecognised capacities of the mind. The implements and rituals of magic were extensions or projections of mind – however apparently irrational - constituted a course of self-confirming initiation to the open-minded and educated practitioner. Most fundamental of all was the training of the Magical Will, through which yogic meditation became possible. (Sutin, 2002, p. 222)

It was also in this work that Crowley first introduced the more archaic spelling of Magick with a K, a convention widely used ever since. Although on a lesser scale, Gardner's books published after this time key into this long tradition of Magical books as special things.

It also keys into a long tradition of the book as magical object or talisman. The book as we know it was born in pagan Rome in the form of a Codex in fifth century AD. Before that the book took the form of a scroll hand written of course on Egyptian papyrus. The Egyptians held a monopoly on the production and supply of papyrus for writing. The creation of the standardized book was begun in great Alexandrian libraries of the Ptolemies. Before the book there is the text - usually confined for use by Priestly or aristocratic elite minority. Religious and ritual in content. The book creates a new intellectual space that of the reader who can interact with the book by recitation and silent reading. In Rome these were most often the augury texts.

The pagan Romans seem also to have invented the Novel. - Reading out loud greatly facilitated by continuous script - needs spoken voice to make sense of it.

The rise of the codex - adopted by the Christians - not pages on a roll but a book with pages - parchment rather than papyrus - cheaper - more portable - easy to read and private where necessary.¹ (Cavallo and Chartie, 1999, p. 15)



In Latin West - a break with the past - reading became restricted in place i.e. churches and subject matter holy scripture. Reading became a silent or murmured activity divorced from its pagan social or dialectical qualities.²

Books became fetish objects - more precious and monumental - punctuation to aid silent comprehension - more luxurious as a form of patrimony.³

Throughout the early Middle Ages the Jews of the Christian West seem to have sacralised the book in much the same way as contemporary Christian society. For Jews as well as Christians the book was a religious object with magical properties, rather than an instrument for communication through reading. Its supernatural charge made it a relic for pious and contemplative adoration, rather than a reservoir of contents that could be drawn upon freely. In short the book was doubly closed to direct exploitation, it was closed within its binding, and it was closed within the ark, to which ordinary people did not have access. This view was in clear contrast to the idea of the open book (in both senses) that began to circulate after the year 1000. One clear example of this view of the book can be seen in the so-called Chronicle of Ahimaaz, an epic genealogical work composed in southern Italy in 1054 on the basis of oral traditions dating back to the second half of the ninth century. It recounts the story of a woman who brought down the wrath of God on her family, causing the death of several relatives, because one Friday she lit a candle before a sacred book, while she was menstruating. The details of the story are somewhat murky; nor is the function of the light (or the contents of the book) at all clear. What seems beyond doubt, however, is the custom of keeping a light before the Book of the Chariot, an ancient Hebrew mystical text. The woman's act is supposed to have contaminated the holiness of the book, here treated as a genuine relic. (Cavallo and Chartie, 1999, p. 150)

We can learn from this that an important ritual activity of the Kabbalah was the reading of the book - reading or more especially chanting aloud a mystical or magical text was a ritual.

Renaissance⁴ pagan revival also revival of books and secular reading; abbreviations, two column spreads - sectioning an aids to broader quick understanding. The roots of humanism lie within the ancient pagan philosophy and hermeticism.

On 10th December 1513 Niccolo Machiavelli wrote a letter to his friend. In the previous year, when Piero Soderini's government fell and the Medici regained control



of Florence, he had lost everything he valued most. He had tried to build a citizen army; it collapsed. He has prized his position in the government; he was sacked. Suspected of conspiracy, he was imprisoned, tortured and ended up on his farm outside Florence. Here he yearned for any sort of political occupation, quarreled and gossiped with his neighbours - and read:

Leaving the wood I go to a spring, and from there to my bird-snare. I have a book with me, either Dante or Petrarca, or one of the lesser poets like Tibullus, Ovid and the like: I read about their amorous passions and about their loves, I remember my own, and I revel for a moment in this thought. When evening comes, I return to my home, and I go into my study; and on the threshold, I take off my everyday cloths, which are covered with mud and mire, and I put on regal and curial robes; and dressed in a more appropriate manner I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men and am welcomed by them kindly, and there I taste the food that alone is mine, and for which I was born; and there U am not ashamed to speak with them, to ask them the reasons for their actions, and they, in their humanity, answer me, and for four hours I feel no boredom, I dismiss every affliction, I no longer fear poverty nor do I tremble at the thought of death: I become completely part of them. (Cavallo and Chartie, 1999, p. 180) Books are and have always been very liberating things.

Notes

¹*Book of Numa* 181BC (Cavallo and Chartie, 1999, p. 64) burnt as it ran counter to institutionalized religion (see Livy) *Egyptian Papyrus* - classics found in even smallest towns. (Cavallo and Chartie, 1999)

²Doukipudonkran- [*C'est*] *d ou qu il puent donc tant?*: so how come they smell so bad .

³(Cavallo and Chartie, 1999, p. 17)

⁴revolution of Gutenberg although systems of reference existed before the printed books - e.g. indexes. (Cavallo and Chartie, 1999, p. 22)

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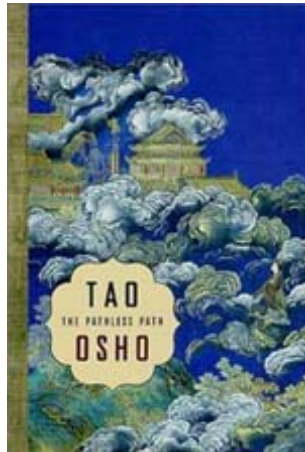
Reviews: Books

Found Tribe: Jewish Coming Out Stories, Lawrence Schimel, editor
(Sherman Asher Press: , 2002 \$15.95)



I will admit to a certain degree of internal resistance when I was first approached to review a collection of coming out stories. I received my Queer theory training right at the time when GLBT academics were still in the thrall of Foucauldian theory. I, therefore, retain a certain ambivalence to the “coming out” story both as literary genre and as socio-cultural imperative. The modern concept of coming out often seems to speak more to the iconographic and allegorical—whether presented as the grand moment of revelation or as a mythic, ongoing dual process of personal interrogation and public disclosure.

This said...Mr. Schimel’s book is so different. So very different than the routine coming out to self or nuclear family unit anthology. Sure those elements are present in these pieces, but they occupy a space which is strikingly rich and historically textured with culture and tradition. This collection is almost unimaginably beyond the 1-2-3 coming out mileau.



Tao

The Pathless Path

New Release from
Osho

mechanicaldiva.com/mof15/oshobooks.html

Mr. Schimel is a talented and discriminating editor who can tell the difference between writing and *good* writing. Each of the pieces included in this collection are strong and polished stories.

The material is identity, history, family, culture and religiousness. All topics which are double-sided from a gay Jewish/Jewish gay perspective. The authors come from both sides of the historic divide that marks the modern advent of identity politics with its imperative to seek out and declare one's "self" identity. Belonging to more

New from

Mandrake Press Of Oxford

In an explicit sex magick orgy, *History of Fun* recounts the origins of a powerful occult phenomenon, the cult of Thelema.

Artist and mother Est, can no longer numb the magnetic pull of her destiny with drugs. Newly aroused instinct propels her to a fateful encounter with Stritch, half starved rock god and member of The Beast's secret cult. Est is inevitably attracted towards the hub of their organisation.

The Beast 666 and his Scarlet Woman 156, luxuriate in ritual sex magick devised to attract new acolytes, while Mama Shag uses Ridelands, her country estate, for secret gatherings of the cult's inner circle. Here acolytes are tested and newcomers initiated, proving their allegiance in the mysteries which unfold within the underground chamber.



'I want to thank you for the feast you provided with further pages of 'History of Fun'. I am beginning - just beginning, to become conscious of the sheer scope and depth of your vision, to say nothing of the subtleties which lurk in almost every line.' - Kenneth Grant

Fruit of the Mandrake

<http://www.mandrake.uk.net>



than one of the culturally delineated identity groups makes for internal (and external) conflict—overriding or occasional. While reading several of these stories, I recall I boyfriend I had years ago who was gay, African-American and Jewish. He would spend long self-critical periods agonizing over which “identity” he was and in which order they should be applied. He would end up flying from one extreme to another—spinning Public Enemy albums one week and speaking Hebrew the next, finally devolving into an escapist blur of drink and drugs.

Each of these stories reflects a different approach, facet or understanding of what it means to be Jewish and to desire men. The questions examined are not simply historical or cultural, however. The one item I found most striking, and compelling, is that the contributors are also deeply religious each in their own way from Orthodox to reform. One piece in particular, written by a Rabbi, examines in depth the cultural and religious distrust between Orthodox Judaism and homosexual practice.

Not surprisingly the family and parents play a large role in many of these stories. The extended family is even more than simply a distant historic anachronism. There is more meat (to borrow from the title of another of Schimmel’s books) on the sinews of the Jewish family. The stories reflect more than just gay identity vs. family identity. They present issues of spirituality, social history and deeply rooted cultural heritage.

The jewel of this collection is a piece written by a 15y.o. about not just coming out at age 11 but also converting. Schimmel is a gifted writer in his own right (he recently won the Reisling award for Sci-Fi poem) and his introduction does well to frame the diverse voices of the collection.—*sd*

The Life & Works of Marie LaVeau, Raul Canizares

(Original Publications: New York, 2001 \$5.95)

Though only a slim 66 pages, Canizares has created the best work to date on the enigmatic New Orleans woman known as the “queen of all Voodoo.” The book has two parts: the first a uniquely informed (brief) biography of the widow Paris (aka Marie LaVeau) and the second is a collection gris-gris, cleansings, charms and hexes copied directly LaVeau’s personal notebook. Canizares draws from his two-years spent visiting Willie Glapion, a direct descendent of LaVeau and Voodoo “doctor.” The author succeeds in making his



book both intelligent and accessible and avoids falling into the trite formulae ubiquitous to modern spellcraft. The success of this biography should come as no surprise to anyone who has read Canizares' earlier works, including the definitive *Cuban Santeria: Walking With the Night* (Destiny Books). It's hard for me to imagine a better use of six dollars.

Mystics & Messiahs, Philip Jenkins
(Oxford University Press, 2000 \$15.95)

Jenkins' history of cults and new religions in America helps to fill many gaps in the history of modern religious movements and the backlashes against them. The first of two striking contributions of his book is Jenkins' detailed examination of how the anti-cult position was constituted and firmly solidified a century ago and has simply been applied to the cult of the moment ever since. The second contribution this book offers up is to provide an historical overview which shows clearly the recycling process of cults and new religious movements. Jenkins argues, and provides ample supporting evidence, that many of the philosophies and tenants of the "New Age" were in common use by the end of the 19th century. Mr. Jenkins' book is history, however, history in its driest most plodding definition. His book of dates, names and briefly sketched historical instances sorely lacks the inclusion of amusing anecdotes. Many of the subjects that the author focuses on were characters and the book would be much improved to have included their contributions to the rich tapestry of religious expression—rather than simply glossing their philosophies and the opposing reaction to it. The chilling moment of the book is when one realizes how the (largely fictitious and utilitarian) anti-cult agenda affected such important and tragic American events as Jonestown and Waco.- —sd

The English Mahatma, Mogg Morgan
(Mandrake Press: Oxford, 2002 \$14.00)

This novel tells the story of Evelyn Murugen, an Englishman who travels to India where he is initiated into an ancient Tantrik sect of the Tankhem tradition. Murugen begins to learn tantrik yoga and soon meets Jacky a young egyptologist. They soon discover a deep sense of connectedness. Mr. Morgan is a talented and imaginative writer whose vast knowledge of both Eastern tantra and western mystery tradition flower in this work. Builds off of Morgan's earlier theoretical work *Sexual Magick* (issued under the pen-name Katon Shual). —sw. pa



Reviews: Music

Sentir, Omar Sosa

Omar Sosa's new CD is a beautiful, eclectic collection of new jazz—representing a diverse fusion of experience and influence. Mr. Sosa artfully blends Parisian jazz, be-bop, American jazz and traditional Cuban bata drumming. The theme of this album appears to be the Orishas—almost every song is infused with their spirit: “Opening for Elegguá” “Rojo Changó” “Azul Yemayá” and “Sister in Yellow” to name a few. Sosa dedicates the album to “everyone who holds faith in their hearts and especially to all the sons and daughters of Ochun and Yemayá...” As one listens to this album it is easy to be carried away on the bata drum's rhythms or to dream of a smoky club (made almost palpable by Sosa's be-bop cadence). It is not easy to get a deep sense of the celebration the artist feels for, as he states in the liner notes, “Our Spirits, Ancestors, and Orishas.” —*sd*



Moon's Milk (in four phases), Coil



Have a great new double CD from Coil called 'Moon's Milk (in four phases)' and 'The Solstice and Equinox singles collected'. (eskaton 23) As a long time fan of Coil I have to admit that the last three releases have become my favourites. They just seem to get better and better. The musick is experimental, jazzy, ambient designed for (perhaps derived from) ritual work. Quite intense and not good background musick - but if you want to get into some good head spaces I really recommend it - if you're not familiar with Coil maybe try 'Musick to play in the dark - vol 1) first. Some of this was used as soundtrack in the recent C4 Crowley doco. My only criticism of the album is that the final track really jarred me out - perhaps they'd like that - lull you into a false sense of security then wham! There's always the programme button on the CD player if you want to loop a track for a ritual. And according to the credits, Coil on this project includes the head of the Caliphate OTO - Bill Breeze! —*mm*

Coil's Homepage: <http://brainwashed.com/coil/>

Coil CD's available through Mandrake UK <http://www.mandrake.uk.net/coil.htm>



Cameron Dialogues**part one**

Prem Arun

Cade made his way through the day's collection of yuppies and would-be intellectuals. He sat down tipping his coffee slightly as his elbow caught the table. "Always the absent-minded klutz"

"Don't worry about it. Your shift at the bookstore over?" Cameron asked.

"No just on my lunch break. How are the books you order?"

"Good. I've read both of them before. The Crowley is a new edition of two books I already own. The other *The Voudon Gnostic Workbook*, I loaned to a friend who promptly disappeared with it. I need it for a research project I am working on, so I figured it was as good a time as any to replace it. Did you find the book interesting?"

Cade felt himself blush. It was almost as if he had been caught snooping. He found Cameron's smile reassuring. "I found it a little difficult to understand, but what I did made me curious. Are you doing a research project on Voodoo?"

"Voudon." Cameron corrected. "Yes, I'm in the process of finishing my doctrinal thesis in comp religion at Duke. I came up here to take a little time off and get my notes in order. Right now, I would be happy if I returned next term with only an outline."

"What brought you all the way to this god forsaken backwater?"

"You might be a little too harsh on your small patch of Eden, but I have to admit asking myself the same question. It's certainly quite far away from my field work. No mambos hiding in the alley ways. But, one might well ask you the same question?"

"What brought me back? Actually... I don't know. I guess I thought I could return home again. I had visions of being at the forefront—the frontier. I had high flung theories that it would keep my edge sharp. Now I am just here and I can't seem to leave. All I managed to do is drive myself crazy and lose everything I ever knew." He stopped himself. What was he doing unloading all this on a stranger. Maybe it was easier; he certainly had not said either of those two sentences to himself before. He moved quickly to change the subject. "So, how did you get interested in Voudon?"

"I was always drawn to the unexplainable. That I wanted to grow up and be a magician and a faggot were the only truths I knew as a kid. I dreamed of being



the witch on H.R. Puff & Stuff. In college, I got involved with the Radical Faeries movement. After two years at U of Wisconsin, I brought my academic standing up enough to transfer to NYU. Soon after I moved, I started dating my first real boyfriend. Pedro was a film student who had spend his life shuffled back and forth between Spanish Harlem and Miami. It only lasted eight months, but we still remain friends. He introduced me to Mother, my teacher.

“I dropped the earthy-crunchy fairy shit shortly after I moved to the City. It just didn’t make ideological sense in my new urban surroundings. I was just beginning to get involved with a dark magical group, when Pedro showed up and soon introduced me to Mother. With Pedro at my side and Mother as my guide, I was softly led into *Les Mysterie Vudus*. I attended my first *ceremony* and was hooked. The energy, the emotion, it was so palpable. There was no need nor requirement for belief.”

Cade began to drift into the mental drone of the skeptic that the zealous always invoked in him. He had to admit, though, that Cameron certainly sounded sincere and the notion that a gay man could also be deeply spiritual intrigued him. “What is it about Voudon that interested you so much?”

“It’s dynamic and alive rather than stagnant and dead like some other religions we can think of. It draws from roots buried deep in the rich, primordial soil of human origin. Though parched at times, its tree has grown and been cared for since before history. It comes out of our Eden—our real Eden—not some myth given to us by a bearded father surrogate.

“It is Voudon’s ability to adapt and change that really fascinated me. It transforms itself to whatever is called for at the time. It grows along with the needs of the people and the visions of their collective consciousness. They shape each other, in contrast to the heavy hand of the patriarchal systems which attempt to stagnate a populace that is moving rapidly away from their control. Voudon has survived because of its innate ability to mutate with times and environmental criteria. It survived the slave trade, the forced conversion to Christianity, the crushing mechanisms of economy and, now, the flood of government sponsored drugs.

“She is a great mother who swallows opposition whole. She is like Kali-Ma—her vanquished adversaries becoming just a garland of so many skulls adorning her neck. She is a generous mother who protects and provides for her children.” Cameron paused to drink his coffee.

“Obviously Voudon started in Africa. It is actually a blend of several different African religions, the most prominent being Yoruban—the majority of slaves having been brought from that nation. Thrown into such a catastrophic arena, the shamans naturally became a focus point for the uprooted and confused. The diverse situations gave rise to a different variant to the original Yoruban mythos. In Brazil one finds



Candomblé, Ubanda and Macumba; Santeria and Lucumi in Cuba; Voudon in Haiti, Santa Domingo and New Orleans. It stayed close to its roots in some instances, such as Brazilian Candomblé, and mixed with Catholicism in others like Haiti and Cuba. What do you know of Voudon? Anything?”

Cade quickly wiped the coffee from the edges of his mouth, trying to conceal that he was chewing the last bite of bagel. “Not much, I have to admit. Just what I have seen in the movies like *Serpent and the Rainbow* and *The Believers*.”

“I preferred *Live and Let Die* myself.”

They both laughed.

“Do you practice or is your interest just scholarly?”

“It began just as a fascinating research project. I wasn’t ready to move so drastically away from the neo-paganism that I had been involved with. But like Maya Deren, Karen MacCarthy Brown and others along the way, I found it impossible to resist the pull and remain academic, objective. I think we all reached similar conclusions: ultimately it proved impossible to understand the heart of Voudon without taking the definitive step of initiation. The mystery is not something that one can comprehend from the sidelines. You have to enter the water and flow with the timeless, etc. You have to raise your voice and sing with the Loa.”

Cade hesitated, “Do you practice animal sacrifice?” He was a little embarrassed to utter the questions but the gory cinematic depictions had raised the issue.

Cameron let a wry smile curve the corners of his mouth. “Not personally. I have certainly been present at enough ceremonies and celebrations where live offerings have been made. It occurs for a variety of reasons—cleansings, healing, etc. Plus the Loa, or Orishas, need to eat just like we do. The taking of life is something reserved for the priests, however. I don’t personally have any moral qualms about it. I have more issues with the ghastly things that we do to prepare the meat that is presented to us in supermarkets so cleanly packaged and sanitized.

“Our culture has no concept of death. We flinch and sublimate the sight of road kill on our way to get a triple Big Mac at McDonald’s. We are trained to hide from it—to turn away. When a person is dying we imprison them in the fortress of a sterile hospital. When they die, we either conceal or beautify the remains and then proceed to cloak the reality in archaic rituals. We don’t see death in our daily lives, so we have no capacity to deal with it when it intrudes unexpectedly. When the unwelcome does occur, seeing Death, it is presumed that we need a lifetime of therapy to cope with the event. This would not be true if we grew up with a daily experience with passing. Cultures which have a hand-in-hand coexistence with Death need no vulture therapists—societies that kill to eat, that go to death with the dying, etc.



“The priests I know readily kill what they eat. Mother, my mambo, often argues that for people like you and me, having grown up in the midst of this Western myopia, it may never be appropriate to conduct the sacrifice. As she sees it, our inculcated distance from the death process taints the offering of life with undo morbidity and perversion. Death, ironically, has become something unnatural, foreign to us. We are like a colossal, intellectual ostrich hiding our heads from the one things which is guaranteed us—that we all, king and pauper alike as the old saying goes, are going to die.”

Cade looked at his watch and realized he was dangerously close to being late for work. “Shit. I have to be getting back. It was fascinating talking with you.”

“I’m afraid that I managed to monopolize most of the conversation. If you would like, we could continue our discussion sometime.”

Cade got up. “I would like that. Just give me a call at work.”

“In the meantime, why don’t you take a look at this.” Cameron extracted a small gray chapbook from beneath the pile of books under his left elbow.

“Thanks.” Cade left.

Before Cade went to sleep that night, he took out the book Cameron had loaned him.

Waters of Return: The Aeonian Flow of Voodoo, Louis Martinié.

“Voudon sings with a voice long stilled and denigrated by a pernicious racism. It sings to the mind through the formal elegance and deep insight of its theology. It sings to the heart through the beauty and grace of its diverse pantheon of Low,” began Martinié. It took Cade only twenty minutes to read the small book from cover to cover. He would have been finished sooner, but he kept pausing to think about what he was reading.

He fell asleep still thinking about and dreamed about Maya Deren’s film *Divine Horsemen*. One of his professors had shown it in a documentary film class. He dreamed in stuttering black and white. He witness the offering of a goat to Legba—the castration and shaving of its beard. He floated by the dance as the *Houngan* cleansed a devotee with a chicken and then twisted its neck. The postulants, priests and *vévés* cut in and out of focus before him. Papa Legba standing at the crossroads with his keys and crooked cane. Ogun the god of the warrior, harsh protection and restraint. Agwé and the ark let loose on the sea. Beautiful and tearful Erzuli. *Deuil, je chante le deuil d’Haïti*. Danbala snaking up and down the *peristil*. My ship has sunk, where is the sun O Danbala? Couzin Azaka at work in the fields, walking the dusty road with his stick and bandanna sack. Showing up unexpectedly, Guede. We have much rum and the old woman smokes cigars. Lord of all Guede, Baron Samdi is the cross, the cemetery, the



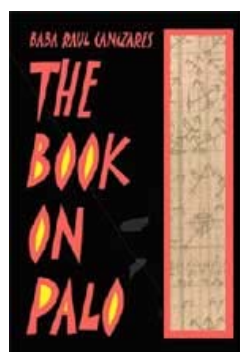
history from which we learn. Dancing now the erotic dance for as death he is ever preoccupied with conception. Kwa Baron. Women swirl by bumping and grinding into his pelvis, delirious, overcome and hoping for fertility. We have rum, come in and dance! The future is the past so life and death fuse in Guede—the truth in the inevitability of the erotic. Brijit, his wife, overseer of justice. Ayida Wèdo companion of the Rainbow Serpent. Ginin, the land across the great sea.

Dans cette marche dan la nuit j'ai rêvé d'eux...



Raul Canizares

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Split a piece of wood,
And I am there.
Lift up the stone,
And you will find me there.

The Gospel of Thomas



Notes:

Cover: Original painting by Raul Canizares

Page 2: Quotes from *Walking With the Night*, Raul Canizares

Page 3: Martinié quote from an unpublished Ms. dated 11 December 1993; Baba quote from *The New Aeon II*(1), 1997,

Page 8: Painting by Ruth Moore (oil on canvas).

Page 18: Quote from the 1938 OTO edition of *The Book of the Law (Liber AL vel Legis)*.

Page 19: Osho quoted from *Zen: The Quantum Leap from Mind to No-Mind*.

Page 24: Drawing by Allen Ginsberg (private collection).

Pages 25 & 39: Photos by Sven Davisson.

Pages 43 & 49: Collages by Jim Provenzano.

Page 67: Parable from *The True Sage*.

Page 73: Photo by Raul Canizares.

Page 74: Quote from “The Gospel of Thomas” translated by Thomas O. Lambdin, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, p. 135.

