

THE UNBEARABLE SEANCE

-Ron Kolm

On Emmanuel Swedenborg's Birthday in 1994 the UNBEARABLES created a TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone) at Shalom's Performance Garage on Stanton Street in NYC, and presented *The Famous Writers Séance*. (Alive, Swedenborg was no stranger to the dead, claiming to have visited Angels numerous times.) The UNBEARABLES, Beer Mystics one and all, undertook the formidable task of channeling the writers who influenced them most in yet another attempt to "kill off daddy." Shalom cranked up a smoke machine, provided weird & obscene lighting effects, and threw in an ancient tinny microphone, which the dead loved, stating that "it made their voices strangely close, though somehow distant at the same time." The material that follows is what was recorded that night.

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INVOCATION

-Rev. P. Lamborn Wilson, DD, HLC, MOC

Brethren & sistren, fellow luminaries & fellow Illuminati -- we are gathered here tonite in ectoplasmic ecstasy & three-martini necromancy to raise the dead & revive lost reputations of rotten writers, snatching from their repose those avatars of unfashionable eloquence to once again -- stop making sense. Cancel the R.I.P. for the lazy dead, the prosaic dead, snatch them back from the Prozac haze of that gemütlich sub-eschatological neverland of doctoral feces, piled higher & deeper on the slender graves of dead writers (and even some who, sort of, live). Re-open the Canon, O inky spirits, lend some fire to the whites of their yolk, stoke up a blaze of cemetery inspiration, send us new reams of revelation -- no joke! -- for the Famous Writers School of all time shall be our zombie crewe! Moribund shades of sad chalky autumnal EngLit hallways, smelling of lost time & hesitation, now's your chance. Our staff of trained professional literary trance mediums are standing by, ready to take your calls, here at the shadowy switchboard of never-too-late-nite talkshows of chattering revenants & vanished monthlies. We invoke Patee, capital of the 19th century, the literary clubs, the Hydropaths, the College of 'Pataphysics, the Salon Rosy Cross (spooky background muzak by Erik Satie), the Club des Haschischiens -- the opium, the vin de cacao, the absinthe -- Pale lilies of London, mauve emotions, gilt guilt, liquid laudanum lassitudes of mortuary alabaster & luminescent flesh -- the heyday of the Séance -- tipping tables, apports, spook trumpets, flowers of Summerland, ventriloquy of sepia evenings in evanescent suburbs, Hume, the Fox Sisters, Houdini's mother. Our "horses" are ready, their voodoo-video tuned to the Nth dimension, of poetic amplitude -- our *media* are prepared, like dishes of agar-agar, to be impregnated with the fungus of forgotten narrativity, the sonnetspore from beyond the afterlife of critical bile. Slick channelers, clicked in to channel zero, will canalize your psychic word- hoards to waiting hordes & masses of masses. So -- Come! -- what more do you demand, hungry ghosts? royalties? film options? points? We can call whole novels from the hole of novelists, i.e., the vasty deep, & when we call 'em, they *spew*. We've got the kryptonite parodic power par excellence; the tables are turning, R.S.V.P. -- we're jacked into the cyberspace of posthumous transmission -- we're serving a summons to a séance, black tie, white bones. Rise, rise from your out-of-print sarcophagi, & we shall release you in new editions of eternal glory. Rise from the dusty shelves, the remainder bins, the pulpmills of the Afterlife, sniff the libations of spilled beer -- take a ticket of leave from your literary hell, & get on-line. Ladies & gents, MUMBOJUMBO WILL HOODOO YOU.

INTRODUCTION TO THE UNBEARABLE SEANCE, A DRAMATIC PIECE

-Jim Feast

The Athenian funeral orations that Plato complained about in the *Mencxenus* were made by a rhetor who addressed the assembly of citizens and recalled to them the virtues of the men who died on the field of honor fighting for the city-state. In the final section, the dead heroes begin to speak, of course, through the intermediary of the orator. Now in our performance:

ENTER SKIDMORE

Skidmore: Hi. I'm Thomas Skidmore and I'd like to pass out the title page from my book, *The Rights of Man to Money*. It's been lately published and has been gathering much celebrity. (He hands out flyers to the readers and audience.)

Jim: Could I have one of those?

Skidmore: Sure, kid. (hands him a flyer) Citizens of New York, I call upon you to consult this book before I put the matter before the legislature.

Jim: But this was published in 1829.

Skidmore: Year of our Lord.

Jim: I thought you said it was just published.

Skidmore: Er. What year is this?

Jim: 1994.

Skidmore: Damn. I thought I died *recently*. I guess *that's* why I don't have a hangover.

Jim: How did you get here?

Skidmore: I felt some kind of unbearable aroma drawing me to this strange conclave. (pause)
Wait. Are we still in New York City?

Jim: Damned tooting.

Skidmore: That means -- *Wow*. It's so good to be dead in this year.

CHORUS: 1994

Jim: What are you talking about?

Skidmore: Enough time has passed for me to see if my plans to reconstruct society provided all the benefits I expected they would.

Jim: But what plans were those?

Skidmore: Well, in my book I set down a simple but efficient program. First: "Let a state convention be assembled. Let it claim all property within the state, both real and personal, of all citizens. Let it order an equal division of all this property among the citizens of and over the age of maturity." Second: "When a person's death occurs, let all

the property of that person go to the state: to be distributed in an equal share to the next person to reach maturity.”

In 1829, the Workingmen’s Party of New York City elected two aldermen on my platform. I had the satisfaction to hear them in the City Council Chamber call for an equal division of all the world’s loot.

Jim: But you would want everybody to give up their computers and toilets.

Skidmore: So what. “No man has any true or just title to his possessions; they are, in fact, possessions growing out of injustice, perpetrated by all governments from time immemorial down to the present day.”

Jim: But people would...

Skidmore: Wait a moment, sonny. Are you trying to tell me my plans have not been completely carried out?

Jim: Not by a mile.

Skidmore: All the work I did to get my ideas accepted. I lived in misery in New York, you know, misery and poverty. Truth is, I didn’t do too well in hell either.

CHORUS: Down to the present hour.

ENTER FANNY WRIGHT

Fanny: Hi. I’m Fanny Wright and I’m here to speak on the timely topic: “Christianity: How Do We Get Rid of It?”

Skidmore: Fanny, we’re dead. We can’t give speeches.

Fanny: Dead?

Skidmore: Dust, scattered to the wind, no life.

Fanny: Thomas, what about my daughter?

Skidmore: She died.

CHORUS: 1994.

Fanny: And her grandson?

Skidmore: Dead.

Fanny: And the great grandchildren?

Skidmore: Kaput. Mort. It’s been 150 years since we existed, Fanny.

CHORUS: Down to the present hour.

Fanny: What about my fight against injustice. Did the workers get their desserts?

Jim: No, ma’am. The rich still gather all the fruits, the babes, the liqueurs.

Fanny: What about chattel slavery. Was it abolished? Was the black man ever freed?

Jim: The black and white, the young woman and the old girl, man and boy, all in chains.

CHORUS: All the babes.

Skidmore: But are you telling us no one stands up against the corrupt regime? Does no one write or speak as we two wrote and spoke against injustice?

CHORUS: All in chains.

Jim: It's hard. The rich: the Trumps, the Mellons, the Clintons, destroy publishing companies and hunt down authors. Your works have been proscribed.

CHORUS: Down to the present hour.

Fanny: Doesn't anybody have any guts anymore?

Jim: One small group of writers, The UNBEARABLES, who lack everything: money, power, position, wit, happiness, love, respect -- they are the ones who raised you temporarily from the dead. They remember the past, and they hope by bringing you back to influence the present and perhaps change the future. That's why we're conjuring up the spirits of the dead writers who live on within us -- to talk to them, one to one -- to put a human face on our heroes. That is our mission -- that's what we're doing here today!

(end)

COLETTE'S SONG

-Tsaarah Litzky

How I miss Cheri with his long hard thighs, his willow waist,
his ardent spine that played beneath my fingers like a piccolo,
he was a strong shining blade,
I danced beneath him like Scherezade,
teasing him with my veils of perfume,
first the perfume of violets,
purple as the marks my mouth put on his neck,
then the burning perfume of my tears,
sharp, salty as my fear that Time,
that bitch coquette with her iron corset and black nipples
would take him before I could taste him;
I covered him with forget-me-nots, evergreen,
the petals of orchids, and the sweet mocha paste
at the bottom of a cup of chocolate,
I curled my tongue up along his leg,
licked the spice out of his *jolie fleur* and then

bit down until he cried, Eiiii,
I bit him hard, held him till he bled,
marked him, branded him mine,
parce que Je suis Colette, J'ai rien de regrets,
I am Colette, I have no regrets.
I miss the pretty Egyptian boys I used to buy for thirty *sous*
and the maroon, velvet sofas swollen with gossip and intrigue
I miss them too,
and my little dog Fifi and the tender pink breasts of Gigi
and Soutine and Claudine and Mitsou and Mimi the tart
with the voice of a lark,
I miss les mushrooms *sauté* and the oysters *grille*
and the way Missy and I played tag in the park
we smoked cigarillos, wore tuxedos,
she was my gladiola, I was her pussy willow,
Je suis Colette, J'ai rien de regret,
mes livres son lirez par tout le monde,
my books were read by everyone,
I danced the tarantula before the King of Sweden,
bared my breast so he could kiss it,
I never wasted a *rendez-vous* or spilled Champagne on a friend,
I took my fourteen-year-old stepson in his father's den
and for starters, showed the boy how to undo my garters,
I left no fruit untasted, sucked the wells of love and laughter dry,
and one day I lined my eyes,
set out my pens,
but then I died,
Je suis Colette, J'ai rien tie regret.

FINNEGAN JOYCE

-Ron Kolm

Hello, hello, James Joyce here, but briefly, yes, the voice, yes, I know it doesn't sound so very good, no, the voice does not fare well here in the dead zone -- O, and I used to be a tenor, such a beautiful tenor that they told me, more than once, yes, that I could have been a

contender -- but don't take my word for it, listen to the record, do they still have records? it was a *Finnegan's Wake* rap sort of thing, yes, as you can see I try to keep up -- should have used more bass, a little sampling, be OK on the boombox then -- but I'm pulling your leg, as if a shade could pull anything -- because, now that I'm dead, I don't have to protect the image I worked on so hard to create -- I'm finally free, I tell you -- though I still rejoice at the number of academics who toil in its shadow -- who till the field I manured so well -- the me they think they know is a construct, only part of the story -- James Joyce as Jesuit -- James Joyce the aesthete -- going slowly blind -- grinding out the great creations in the face of insurmountable odds; misunderstanding, penury, censorship, the lovely chains of Ireland past and always present but, shit, what else could I do -- I was as trapped by the iron logic of my own work as any joycean scholar -- forget modernism, the fetter that bound me and, yes, broke me, was the notion of progress -- I started small, a few poems, then moved on to short stories, well crafted they were, too, and finally graduated, with my *Portrait*, to the novel -- all well and good -- we were an upward moving line on the graph of life, steadily ascending, and seeing the sense and shape of my literary output I made the big jump, the quantum leap, to *ur-novel*, the novel as encyclopedia, and the result was, of course, *Ulysses* -- but that particular jump from the novel we all know and love to the thinner atmosphere of "Great Book" is a tricky one, because where do you go from there?

The answer, as I gradually came to realize, was to pen scripture, to convince myself and others that I was no longer a mere mortal fooling around with the same words we all have access to, but, in fact, that I was engaged in a sacred quest, the creation of Holy Writ, an incredibly dense, almost unreadable, compendium of everything known, the only book the ideal reader would ever need -- and I also came to the realization that after I finished this thing I would have to die -- it's not like I could break out of the path I was on and do a cookbook, for Christ's sake! -- so I took as long as I could to write and rewrite, to code and encode my mad bible -- seventeen years -- and while I was doing this, other stuff kept happening, life doesn't stop, and the real me kept seeping out and I tried so hard to keep that stuff off to the side, but it's all there, all out in the open, thank God the scholars mostly ignore real life, my poor mad daughter, Lucia, wanting to date that hanger-on, sad Sam Beckett -- put a stop to that -- and after dinner, when our guests sat at the table wanting to wring me dry, searching for clues to the meaning of my work, I blew their minds instead, yes, I'd jump up and perform strange terpsichorean feats -- yes, I'd pop my right leg up behind my head and grasp the foot with my left hand and hop wildly about, yes, then I'd scissors kick all over the fucking place, mentally trying to knock the smug smiles off their faces, 'cause they were all a bunch of assholes and, yes, speaking of assholes, I'm going to recite from memory,

'cause there isn't much else to do after you die except memorize, a letter I wrote to my wife, Nora, while we were briefly separated in 1909, because it pleases me to do so:

My sweet little whorish Nora, I did as you told me, you dirty little girl, and pulled myself off twice when I read your letter. I am delighted to see that you do like being fucked arseways. Yes, now I can remember that night when I fucked you for so long backwards. It was the dirtiest fucking I ever gave you, darling. My prick was stuck up in you for hours, fucking in and out under your upturned rump. I felt your fat sweaty buttocks under my belly and saw your flushed face and mad eyes. At every fuck I gave you your shameless tongue came bursting out through your lips and if I gave you a bigger stronger fuck than usual fat dirty farts came spluttering out of your backside. You had an arse full of farts that night, darling, and I fucked them out of you, big fat fellows, long windy ones, quick little merry cracks and a lot of tiny little naughty farties ending in a long gush from your hole. It is wonderful to fuck a farting woman when every fuck drives one out of her. I think I would know Nora's fart anywhere. I think I could pick hers out in a roomful of farting women. Goodnight, my little farting Nora, my dirty little fuckbird:

And goodnight to you all, good night, good night.

DJUNA

-Jill Rappaport

In 1982 I met Djuna Barnes at the Jefferson Market, where I was trying to cop a tomato. Barnes was squeeze-testing Australian gooseberries and we struck up a stiff conversation. She looked vaguely familiar but so does everybody in the West Village. When I found out who she was, I just 'bout sank to the sawdust covered floor in shock. I must have stood giving off the cell-burning fumes of fragmentation psychosis for several minutes, during which there gathered around us a small convention of vegetable salespersons and bloody-coated butchers. Djuna had put back the merchandise I fingered, and when I came to and we got out onto the street, I was slightly disappointed that in the confusion she hadn't been more of a mensch.

We stepped outside and I asked if I could visit her sometime. I explained that she was my favorite novelist. 'That's nice,' she said with an imperious and irritable shake of her loose jowls. "I haven't had a girl up in years."

I was living in Brooklyn at the time. One Saturday I put on a black vest, white shirt and tight steer- roping pants, Spanish boots and a cape with fringes hanging off it and then took it all off and changed into a camouflage jacket, ripped jeans and clogs and went in wearing

dark glasses and sipping a diet coke spiked with vodka in a paper bag through a straw to get me off quicker.

Got to West 4th Street and prowled around feeling less and less like it, since ambivalence is my middle name.

Then I made the move. Walked over there and rang the bell bold as... It took a while but she finally leaned out the window, a gargoyle, and pointed inscrutably to the doorway. I think she was not displeased to see me. I had begun to wonder whether in fact she was the goddess of all time.

She came to the small brown door in a hat with an attached head scarf, big earrings, a sweatshirt, shoes with weird heels and no socks, bracelets, eye shadow, looking more like Louise Nevelson than I would have expected. I presented her with a box of Italian cookies and a tulip, feeling embarrassed somehow for sucking up to conventional old-lady-visiting manners.

I took a seat on her worn out flowered couch and asked if it was true that e. e. cummings lived in the same building and she responded by looking at me as if I had crawled out of the garbage. She didn't deign to answer. We were off to a fine start. She surprised me shortly after that by serving tea. The cookies and tulip she had put in the tiny kitchen and not brought out again.

I stayed about forty minutes, sneaking peeks at the spare apartment and avoiding admitting to her that I deified her. Somehow it seemed a craven thing to do.

I told her I wrote. "That's nice," she said, without expressing the slightest interest beyond that. It occurred to me that if I had been she I probably would have done the same thing.

She asked me if my parents were still alive and I told her my mom was. "Take good care of her," she said cryptically. I felt spooked. Finally, sensing that nothing major was going to develop, I got up to go.

"Here's something for your scrapbook," she said in a pinched voice just before closing the door on me. She pulled something from a hiding place and gave it to me. "It's something I never published," she said. She told me not to show it to anybody. Since I didn't promise her anything, here it is, immediately following. Next time I dropped by; she was out and the time after that she was dead:

IN LOVE WITH HERSELF

[In thick Brooklyn guido accent] I must apologize fuh this unfortunate way of speaking but on the way to hell I was laid over in Bay Ridge.

It's a-great a-being dead, splendid being great, which only in death, finally, can one be. I am rouged in the grave, given emerald earrings for to fence with the infinite and a little girl puppy whom I call Nebraska.

I have Paris, I have Athens. I have Stratford-on-Avon and I have the Black Hole of Calcutta, whenever I raise a nervous finger. I smoke myself silly because nothing can kill you when you're already dead. I drink and take drugs including Venutian amphetamines and I read until deep into the night without worrying about tasks or payment or alarm clocks or social relations. I do things when the spirit moves me, which happens when it happens. I store my thoughts in an E-pig and my prose in the chamberpot of Woden, god of Wednesdays, from which only I can retrieve information because I have passworded it with a special, golden-handed password from Elizabethan Spain.

I have love affairs that, like dissolution, don't kill me but make me strong. I have never been stronger than in death and yet, in death, I retain that delicacy of phrasing, that fragility of aspect that is at the heart of all true feminines, the flowers that make my heart tick and which brutally eluded me in my living life of a stone Athena, masculine and unyielding. I find 'em, fuck 'em, forget 'em. I sit in bars with 'em and tell tales, get up to powder myself and pet dogs in the alleyways, hoist ass with brutal sailors, then come home to the bar or the tea garden and get up on the merry-go again.

I wear destroyed Levis with hand-pailletted evening bodices from Weimar, color of midnight in modern Cairo, and shoes of a vicious arch, toe and heel that would force any fleshblood person to her knees. I dance on the top of megaliths in financial districts that would make Churchill's nose explode.

I am living without exigencies for the first time.

No dishes but that molder in sunny Alpine kitchens built over cemeteries and no pans to empty unless, as is true, I adore feline urine, if only to spite Daddy.

The trick is that in life one must love or be loved and in death one no longer has to choose. So that, once one has adjusted to the absence of disturbing spring days when the world seems clearly to be ending, or winter mornings in which one's feet threaten to come flying off or great winged dawns before the fly-spattered pond of earthly misery has unfrozen, one finds that death, after all, is simply the ultimate confusion, putting to shame all the meager trinkets of a life spent waiting for one's loved ones to die first because mortality is the last thing we embrace.

T. S. Elliot no longer washes my feet; I threw him off the roof of 117 1/2 Duffy Place. I am no longer referred to by means of the awkward adjective "woman." In fact, T. S. himself is now "woman," and I taunt him at cruel intervals, as his large and knobby penis is tormented by impersonal used car salespeople and utility spokesmen who find that nothing sells like meat.

I do not inhabit a heaven nor a hell. This is the land called Nuttinsplink, a region where matter is recycled. Preciously singular, "*a moi*" in life, I have retained my qualities and

capitalized upon them here while indeed not closing out the less endowed but grasping them firmly by the armpits and dragging them up to my nicely upholstered level. Money has gone out the window and privilege with it. WE live not in one of them bogus meritocracies in which shit rises but in the kingdom of that world, world where “king” lies stripped of all connotation but the reflexively grammatical.

My hatreds, then. Knee-jerk and unexamined, they flourish here like turned-on mechanical worms with nasty voices, and I have the pleasure of seeing them cease to control me. Small women, hunchbacks, the great unwashed, the underclasses, those with stupid eyes, those who think too slowly, those with loose hanging baubles of skin and those whose teeth are rotten. The rich, the greedy, the poor and the eternally despised. They are all here, propped up like dolls against the bare sheetrock we accept as our walls. They have no powers. Dogs govern them. I have resumed feeding rats and torturing my enemies; here the torture consists of making them watch *Ghostbusters* all day and dance to Billy Joel records all night. Many are cured of their odium within minutes of this treatment regime.

Redemption? I got yer redemption right here (reaches for crotch and makes lewd gesture).

FLAUBERT APPEARS

-Sparrow

I am Flaubert; Flaubert am I. When one's name is Flaubert, it is a pleasure simply to say one's name over and over: I am Flaubert; Flaubert am I.

Even the name Gustave becomes beautiful attached to the name Flaubert.
Gustave...Flaubert.

It is a private joke among the celebrated that we became famous because we have the best names. Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dali are examples of this. In your time, Prince, Madonna, Joey Buttafuoco, and Conan O'Brien were all propelled to greatness by their names. A great name will make a mediocre man great. If my name had been Frank Porley, I would've had to work four times as hard to be a great writer. As it is, I was Gustave Flaubert, so I need write only in the mornings.

Sadly, in death one loses one's name. In the world I live in now, a world of shadows and coughing, men and women wander the streets like lost children, trying to remember their names. It is a pleasure for a moment to live again among the living -- to be Gustave Flaubert, a man who became as great as his name -- before I disappear again into the name-destroying darkness.

THE SECOND COMING OF YEATS

-Carter/Yeats, 3/29/94 (under a full moon in March)

The Gyres! The Gyres! The Gyres!
In all these hip East Village bars
Where dissipated young men in despair
Lust for their ass as well their yellow hair
Who play as swans at Pinball, so coole
These brilliant creatures who make my heart so sore
For beauty dies of beauty, mirth of mirth...
But oh why brood love's bitter mystery
I'll yet find some pretty punk,
What matter my numb nightmare?
Wisdom is the property of the dead
The damned have howled away their hearts
In drunken frenzy for the moon --
Max Frisch, the Ace, and Sapphire
With their streams of blue-tip cuties
Or Bob's or Motel Hell or Sophie's
Where the brown waters flow so free
Like the honey of my wasted peaceful youth at Innisfree,
And at midnight on the E. vii pavement
As the image of purging bulimics recedes,
I amble past the Crowbar, where
They separate all those famous Greek men from the boys:
Ed-the-Pissed, Ass-Lickees, and Hector-the-molester;
Here too are the fairies of my youth
Mad Oscar's wild about them all:
Cuchulainn and Conchubar who prattle with their prickies
And sad Oisin with his wandering fists of fury...
Ah, but yet I pine for noseringed Leda
As I water last at Brownie's,
For that lil' gone Maude and Lady G., but what
Are they to these new Crazy Janesers
Who make tremble my slender needle of bone

Gold-enameling this here new Byzantium?
This is no village for old men?
The living beauty is for the younger?
Bah! This old Lecher purges up
Every new trick discovered in the grave,
For the drunkard is a deadman
And all dead men are drunk -- yea,
The intellect is farced to chooze
Perfection of the life or of the booze...
Ah but groping with my dirty hand
This old ghost's thoughts become lightning
As this full moon in March,
I call up old McGregor from the grave
And, having discovered the gong-tormented secret
Of transmigrational masturbation,
Revise my tawdry verse:

THE SECOND COMING OF THE SECOND COMING

Yearning, burning in the sinking bog
The whole world falls apart when I flog my log,
This gyrating faux-con; its center I cannot hold,
Its bloody-dim tide is loosed -- ah...
The anarchists are loosed on Thompkins Square
And everywhere: yuppies lose their innocence;
The worst lack all conviction,
While the best can't pay their rent.

Surely some re-evaluation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is in my hand
The Second Coming!! Hardly does it blurt out,
This vastly mundane spirit --
And I'm troubled of going blind --
When for dessert, from somewhere in my body's loins,
Out of my pitiless man's head, whilst moving my slow thighs...
The shadows reel, the darkness drops

(These night mares still vex my sleep --
Though I've been stoned nearly a century,
Under Ben Bulben's brow -- having robbed the cradle,
Drowned that little sphinx' ceremonial blood...)
Ah --, ah --, ah! What rough beast sloshes out at last
Toward the bathroom to be flushed?

MADNESS (VIRGINIA WOOLF)

-Susan Scutti

I supposed I'd never get over the humiliation. Time was measured and then measured again in minutes instead of weeks. The neighbors' eyes appeared peculiarly piercing and my sister's mouth formed a tight line of irritation as she passed from the room. Others were relied on, yet no one offered comfort.

I remember my mind felt raw, wounded like a thing exposed to the harsh sun of self-criticism for too long, an intuition, a kind of tarnished vision of life's preciousness and waste dominated my mind. I had not been chosen to give my youth to a man. Later, I would not be chosen to bear a child. In those weeks of convalescence a particular view, the one seen from the upper storey windows that look out over the southern edge of the pond -- this view alone offered me some brief respite from my own imaginings. Only there was I able to think again of the finer things in human nature.

Unwillingly, I progressed to health fearing that when I was well again, a certain mark would be left on me, a mark easily distinguished by others. And later after both madness and healing passed, I recognized the sign had been with me all along. Each of us is an unwitting conduit of a particular series of experiences. My own fate is to bring to fruition that which a frailty of nerves, an unbearable sensitivity and an intensity of emotion can bear. My true healing, then, was to feel for the first time in my life that my weaknesses are precious gifts, infinitely rare.

Once while traveling in a remote region of Holland, I glimpsed a young woman in a village street from the train. Her blond skin was luminous, the expression of her eyes solemn, her figure exquisite. For how many centuries had her family lived in poverty and ignominy, their beauty and nobility unseen by the larger world? Possibly this rushing moment of youth in an impoverished village was the single flowering of generations.

Bitterly, I gazed at her. Yet, this preciousness and waste is everything. The thrust of our species is towards perpetuation and only our human nature wishes to also create beauty.

Occasionally, a separate psyche rises from the innumerable small deaths of the soul, enflaming the hearts of those who wait and witness.

LENNY'S LAST ROUTINE

-as channelled by Alfred Vitale

(note from author: a few days ago, i received a transmission from the great beyond. it was lenny bruce. he told me to transcribe what was to be his final magnum opus...the routine he formulated during his final moments in the bathroom of his california home. i hope this is successful...since you know how vengeful spirits can be when they don't get their way!)

we take you now to the bathroom of the fabulous comedian and dean of satire...lenny bruce...no, wait...leonard alfred schneider (why do ya gotta lie now?)...yes, LEONARD ALFRED SCHNEIDER, aka "Jewboy"...and that's who you are...

nice to see so many tiles here...haven't seen you tiles in a while. y'know...i was just tellin billy the other day...y'know, who'da thought back in '53 that we'd be sittin' here with a needle in one hand and a rolled up ball-a-toilet paper in the other...i'm tellin' ya. we was just smokin' vice-a-roys and hangin' with some colored folk at the jazz clubs, hustlin' rollin' papers and roach clips and then WHOP! now we got an eight-page layout in *Junk Illustrated*...a real wild set of color-slides featurin' junkie poses and junkie celebrities with some helluva slogans underneath...here's dinah shore singin' "shoot some junk today, in the USA" & carmen miranda for another commercial: "I'm chiquita the junkie and i've come to say, you gotta try to hit it in a certain vein..."

AAAY...will you cut that out? i don't know who ya think yer talkin' to mr. schneider...yeah, SCHNEIDER...where'd ya get that BRUCE jazz anyhow... you ain't on no stage...yer on the toilet and you got a handkerchief tied around yer arm! c'mon!!

look, wouldya cut me some slack, man? i mean, i'm in PAIN over here, huh? i wanna feel better...y'know how it is...people NEED to feel good...like, there's a lotta pain in the wörl...i mean, i just fell outta window a few months ago...pushed my legs right up into my hips...and it hurts...it hurts, man. you know...we all gotta get rid of pain...that's why we got aspirin, right? well...that aspirin jazz just don't cut it around these parts...

HEY SCHNEIDER....did you know that the junk comin' through that needle is poisoned?

aaah...this paranoia crap again. everytime i do this bit i get paranoid. wanna laugh?
remember that one about the prison picture...when you got the colored guy sayin'...“you know, you don' mind dyin' so much if yas got a nat'ral sense a riddim, yuk, yuk” and then ya got the schlub walkin' that last mile...to the chair...and black guy says, “there's the chair...i don't wanna go...what should i do? what should i DO?” “don't siddown, ma son!”

yeah...that works a bit, man...but this is the big show...the real one. no more lounges for you, baby...from now on its that big, classy joint...the biggest one in the sky...

so when i get up there, am i gona be defendin' cocksucking in front of god? with mooses and christ on the jury? “do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothin' but the truth? so help you me?” and god's probably one of those judges ya just can't BRIBE...y'know? ferget it...

lissen up, schneider...here's something you seem to forget...people aren't against cocksucking, 'cause if they were, they'd say don't DO that...but instead, they say “don't SAY that!”

how's that again, mr. legal defense man, huh???

mr.comedian, did you notice that you have slid off the toilet seat?

aw...i didn't even finish my crap yet...that just beats all don't it? y'figure, all yer life, your mother tells you to wear clean underwear...“if you get into an accident, I don't want people standin' around sayin' ‘ooh, look at his DIRTY underwear!” and here i am with half a turd in the toilet and half a turd dangling from my rectum! it's a freaky business...

did you notice that you are lying flat on your back, on the cold tiles, with your eyes closed?

(fadeout with a real wild tune...“somebody's gonna die tonight...tonight, tonight...die somebody tonight, tonight...”)

SHUT HIM UP! SHUT THAT NUT UP!!!

well you won't be sayin' that when i'm FAMOUS...

BRAUTIGAN EPIGRAMS

-Carol Wierzbicki

Why. Why you ask. It's people. People who came here and drank my goddamned wine. I'd rather talk to the ducks.

Want to see my real poems? Look at the ceiling! [Blamblamblam...] I don't like death. You don't get to shoot holes in the ceiling. You are more like the holes themselves, or like the warm indoor air escaping through the holes... Why did I put those holes in the ceiling? Because not putting them there was a lot harder.

I don't care how goddamn smart these guys are. I'm bored. It's been raining watermelon sugar all day here at iDEATH, and there's nothing to do. Most days go like this now. Different from when I was alive.

Death is just nature's way of telling you to slow down.

Why can't our relationships be as flat and innocent as woodcuts? I always hated the part in the movie when the girl realizes her friendship has turned to love and she gets all twitchy and self-conscious, her eyes darting every which way like silver fish, the camera angle changing suddenly to play up her breasts and narrow waist, and the room begins to spin. We should be like footprints in sand, shallow yet uncompromising, with no doubt as to what shape we are taking before we are trashed or blown away.

O take me for a ride in your flatbed truck, and go so fast my ears are pinned back against my head, eyes full of flyspecked wonder.

That day was one of those days when you feel like you are coated with a fine layer of shit, and everyone can sense it, and everything that comes out of your mouth sounds to you and everyone else like a language that hasn't been invented yet.

The sea is like an old nature poet who died of a heart attack in a public latrine. His ghost still haunts the urinals. At night he can be heard walking around barefooted in the dark.

There are comets that flash through our mouths wearing the grace of oceans, and galaxies. God knows we try to do the best we can. There are comets connected to chemicals that telescope down our tongues to burn out against the air. I know we do. There are comets that laugh at us from behind our teeth wearing the clothes of fish and birds. We try.

ZAP! Unlaid / 20 days -- my sexual image isn't worth a shit. If I were dead I couldn't attract a female fly.

Driven by hunger, I had another forced bachelor dinner tonight. I had a lot of trouble making up my mind whether to eat Chinese food or have a hamburger. God, I hate eating dinner alone. It's like being dead.

The moon is Hamlet on a motorcycle coming down a dark road. He is wearing a black leather jacket and boots. I have nowhere to go. I will ride all night.

GERTRUDE IN THE HAMMAM

-Bonnie Finberg

I was sitting in here as I was sitting here in this place of being in sitting though one may feel a waiting in being that is a tone but not a buzzing a buzzing being another thing than waiting in being. A waiting place open or closed where it's always closed in opening waiting is wherever I am is waiting procedure with open without close that is if it isn't. I was waiting in was where being is also and be isn't yet but will have seen by the time you get here.

She ate with the other ones at lunch time who were eating their lunch though other ones were fasting they weren't. There are many ways of eating there are many ways of fasting and unhungry eating. A hunger that is primal is a body which hungrily proceeds. They ate not hungry in fasting I'm not sure they were eating in hunger they didn't look hungry though they ate hungrily they looked well fed. Together not fasting they ate well fed watching an Indian film on TV. After the eating while others were fasting one of the others rested in drips inside me they echoed in living inside me the resting quiet inside them inside me they echoed in living inside them. Another one of them brought me the tea so I could drink it but only if they brought it. It was inside the glass that they brought me the tea that I could drink it after they brought it. Is there form in gold. Is there leaf for murmur. Alchemy dies in winter gold.

She entered and stripped in water and dripping and echoing was being all over the open above was closed and she dripped in echoes down to her ripped red lace panties she was wet. Shining brown and boneless she came in echoes of waiting to be and proceeding she dripped me and scrubbed. Down and waiting up was falling closed looking up and scrubbing and pleading her case. A book in her window opened the brackets inside the being in me where waiting I opened the echoes dripping. Her knee on my being wet we were sisters we were mothers and daughters our cousins were nieces who had cousins in common and our aunts had uncles but we didn't. All except those kind were scrubbing and being. All knowing is being and I was knowing her being she thought was my being of being scrubbed in foam. There are many ways of living. I was supposed to be better in living so she told me her living but I was living better inside me that waited while she pleaded her case. She was living her scrubbing and scrubbing her living in echo wet domes.

The other ones were still eating with the other ones though it was past lunch and though other ones were fasting they weren't so at it together the Indian film was still on TV while these ones ate while she scrubbed me in foam. There are many ways of scrubbing. A scrubbing that is primal is a scrubbing that is primal is a scrubbing which hungrily proceeds. Proceeding through the body primal there is no vanishing point. There is no mint jelly. Is there mutton. I don't think so. Nor will there be any tonight. Enough is enough is enough.

AQUA VONS VITAE

-Mike Topp

I had a bad case of panty line fever that summer night. Strolling past the Tower Records cultural/industrial complex, I was assailed by a band of -- I'm not sure what they were. Mickey Mouse walked by, and when my hat blew off his ears blew off and we handed each other ears and hat. When I got home, I was terribly thirsty. Suddenly the phone rang. "Cottonmouth!" I answered. It was the Marquis de Sade. "Hey, wanna make another record?" Suddenly the phone rang. "Richelieu!" I answered. It was an amphibian. It was a frog. Suddenly the phone rang. "Once in a while a story comes along that is such a departure from the normal style of a writer that some explanation is in order. This story is not one of those," I answered.

*Lacrimosa dies illa
que resurgat ex faville*

iudicandus homo reus:
huic ergo parce deus!
Pie lesu domine
dona eis requiem.

I had a glass of water. I understood, at that moment, water's method of reasoning, and it seemed to me quite alien to the philosopher, who reasons by first principles, e.g., "I want my MTV!", so that its intellect almost assumes the ways of the divine intellect. I understood that, when it doesn't have an answer, water proposes many to itself, very different from one another. I remained puzzled. Datta. Dayadhvan. Damyata.

Toy boat toy boat toy boat

KARL MARX IN HEAVEN

Tuli Kupferberg

Tuli: Karl?... Karl, I call you through the centuries...

Karl: Vot...vas?...voos? What?

Tuli: It's me, Karl, Tuli -- one of your semi-admirers. I'm calling from the U.S. -- Spring 1994...Heard the latest news about the Soviet Union?

Karl: What...what Soviet Union?

Tuli: Oh, you been outta touch a long time. There was a revolution in Russia.

Karl: Ah, yes...I predicted it would be in ah, um, Germany. But Russia is good!

Tuli: No, no... it wasn't so good.

Karl: Vy, vass happened?

Tuli: Well...it was sort of like State Capitalism instead of real good Communism.

Karl: Oh, those putzes! The vun opportunity I had in the 20th century, *nein*?

Tuli: Yeah, the one opportunity, they fucked it up.

Tuli & Karl: How did *that* happen? Wait, who's talking here *now*?

Karl: Well, listen, you know I always said I wasn't a Marxist. *Je ne suis pas un Marxiste.*

Those epigones, those runts, those morons...ach, you know, I didn't like people too much. Except my own family, I, I...you know I sent my daughters to finishing school...they...too bad they finished themselves off, both of them, killed themselves. But, you know, easy come, easy go. Well, at least I had a...at least my illegitimate son did OK.

Tuli: Oh yeah? How come you didn't acknowledge him when he was still around?

Karl: Well, you know, it was Victorian times...I lived in Victorian England. He turned out to

be a straight forward working-class man, *ja*. How's England doing? *Wo weilest du, mein Englisch Kind?*

Tuli: Oh, England's all fucked-up, too. The Labour Party hasn't been able to do very much. Tell me, do you see Engels?

Karl: Yeah, I see Engels, *ja*. He's still a big dumpkopf like he always was! No, I...I really liked Engels except when he ran around with that cheap Irish broad.

Tuli: Ah, you know, we don't say 'cheap Irish broad' anymore, Karl. That's considered a sexist remark. Why didn't you like her? You're not a middle-class prig, er...prick at heart, are you?

Karl: No, no, I believed in the true *Kulturelle* Revolution.

Tuli: Oh yeah, then how come you took Engels' money to support yourself?

Karl: Ach, I couldn't stand working for that Railway Express. I worked there one day...one day and that was enough. I hate working...work is the curse of the drinking classes...did you ever hear that? I made that up.

Tuli: Ah, no...so how do you spend your time?

Karl: Vell, you know...I drink schnapps, I read the papers...only the papers here, they're fifty years old. I don't know what happens...wè're getting verld var I, no II.. .how many Verld Vars are there? How many verlds is there left?

Tuli: Oh, we don't know. Everything is going to hell here, down on Earth.

Karl: Oh, *ja*? It always was terrible but, you know, we had our ups and downs.

Tuli: Well, Karl, what do you think is going to happen in the future?

Karl: How the fuck should *I* know. All my predictions were wrong -- but I'll tell you one thing, Capitalism will end. Maybe not until the human race ends, but I still have high hopes.

Tuli: High hopes? I didn't know you...

Karl: *Ja*, you know there was a lot of... you didn't know that we had hashish in those days, did you. It came from France, the French Connection.

Tuli: Yeah, do you ever miss the British Museum?

Karl: *Ja*, the Britische Museum...all the Elgin marbles which they stole so nice from the Greeks. *Ja*, I always loved all that classical shit, you know. And up here it's pretty boring -- you can't have a revolution in Heaven, you know, it's not allowed. They send you straight to Hell. I am getting bored...I think, you know, I think we gotta go underground...undersky...here, and one of these days, you know, I predict it, according to my research. You know, we got a copy of all the videos ever made in the whole world here...and we got the highest electronic computers and I can put my finger on any fact I want and I'm using this...I'm writing a book here called *Anti-Kapital*, and once this thing

is finished I'm going to launch it in Heaven and we're going to take over, but don't tell God that I told you this.

Tuli: OK, Karl, nice talkin' to you. Um, I'll call you back in 2094. Good luck with your book.

Do you have a publisher?

Karl: Fuckin' publishers!

CHICAGO: THE PSYCHIC STRIP MALL WILDERNESS

-Sharon Mesmer

"Love is by remembrance."

-Nelson Algren-

It was while living in Chicago that I began writing on the toilet. At first it seemed symbolic; now it's just redundant.

Chicago is a city that changed the natural course of its river for purposes of commerce and worked its mighty railroads to control one-third of the world's supply of dead meat. Despite this resourcefulness, however, Chicago regularly fails to produce two important things: a true major league baseball team, and writers that can make it without the pejorative "Chicago" attached to their professional title. "Chicago" writers thus become accidental skills for the semantic freedom of hated Manhattan.

Something went wrong in that silver-colored yesterday, in the last rustle of Jane Addams' skirts around a congested Sunday intersection near Maxwell and 18th Street. Between the chiseled stone features of Lincoln Park and the thick necks of Canaryville, Chicago's soul became divided and there wasn't any noble middle way left. Like its baseball teams, Chicago's writers choked, and let mediocrity and fear combine to produce their literary universe. Mediocrity became not a passive lacking but an aggressive deterministic stance, encouraged, promoted and vigorously applauded at every Evanston Public Library poetry reading. Certain Chicagoans began "leaving" writing to "settle down." The truth is that writing had left them a long time ago. But these people weren't writers to begin with -- they were young, trustfund liberals up from those lost sad railroad towns of Wilmette and Winnetka whose destinies were to become art ghetto landlords and ruin any neighborhood where real people lived. They thought that being a real artist meant packaging the big, embarrassing emptiness of their souls in dime store rags similar to the ones worn by those noble savages, the underclass. (Of course they paid a lot more for their rags than the underclass ever did.) Having anything more than a can of off-brand pork-and-beans and a broken fork in the house indicated one was stranded

up the bourgeois creek with a conspicuous paddle. All of a sudden, there was no room left for the serious writer to fart in yahoo Chicago.

These phony writers live for the kind of struggle where there's nothing at stake. They moved to Chicago in the first place because they were a-scared o' New York -- that's why there are so many timid rattails disappearing behind the stacks of every Clark Street bookstore, and that's why you see crowds of rodents sipping gassy wine at Friday night gallery openings. Who are the real Chicago writers, you may be asking. The more important question is, where are the real Chicago writers. Well, they're all at home packing, of course. Allow me to digress: the chilling, killing winter wind off Lake Michigan is called the Hawk. But the Hawk is really some kind of whatchamacallit "atmospheric reaction breeze" (look, I'm a dead guy, not a meteorologist) from the endless stream of eastbound airplanes ferrying Chicago's writers out of Chicago at breakneck speed. And if you sit real quietly on the edge of the lake anywhere between the Oak Street Beach and Fullerton you can hear the plaintive pleas from above the clouds: "Hey, pilot, can't this thing go any faster?"

Was it me who said, "Every enduring character in American fiction is someone outside the upper middle classes?" (It's hard to remember when I'm always so busy reminding everybody that I won the first National Book Award -- busier than a one-legged man in a butt-kicking contest.) Barflies, barfers, has-beens and never-wases: it takes amazing strength of will for one of these characters to marshal the psyche's forces for the sissyphean task of just being. The Chicago Mudflower blooms in a desert, and stretches not toward sunlight but darkness, chaos and entropy. And what waters the Mudflower is not rain, but silence -- the Great Silence of the Midwest. The Great Silence was born from the endless expanse of sky and the undulations of prairie grasses under it. This gentle motion roamed free for eons. The Indians knew and respected it -- it was a formidable presence long before they'd arrived. When the Indians and their prairies were destroyed by the settlers, those prototypical landlords, the Indians took one important piece of information with them to their unmarked graves. The Indians knew the people would have to hide once the prairies vanished because the high grasses modulated the Great Silence: moved it gently, soothed its roar, softened it for the ears. Once those grasses were gone the settlers would have to build walls to protect themselves -- high walls that denied the Silence room to move. Soon, no one even needed to listen for it anymore and it was forgotten.

But the Silence didn't disappear. It moved above the walls the people built -- over skyscrapers: pious guardians -- where it could roam free again. And now, in the shuttered hours under the moon's sinister silkiness, or on a Sunday afternoon when the Michigan Avenue traffic has gone soft, you can sense the Silence waiting, moving anxiously out sideways across the wide water, hanging like a restless memory on the corona of the heart.

I love Chicago -- smokestack grove of my naissance, fertile delta of beef-tongued verbiage -- because loving Chicago is the most difficult thing to do well. It may be the only thing I know how to do well. It's not hard to love a city for its glittery midnight towers and brilliant candled bridges reaching across onyx waters, its arcing gracious entranceways to symphonies and department stores, every fire hydrant an imminent lingam. But you can't really love a city until you're able to love its ennui, lethargy and inertia, its dumb doughiness, the pour and hoard of it -- and forgive it for all that you know it will never give you. A city where the familiar voices of friends, so welcome in glad daytime, reveal by nighttime the very despairs that are claiming them. Where, in the garish alleys of that same nighttime, truth and beauty are overcome by indolence 'til morning glistens like a refrigerator full of meat.

RAYMOND CHANDLER

-Carl Watson

One question I get asked a lot by you living people communing with us dead people is -- what does a crime writer do in the afterlife where there is no crime? Well, for one thing, there's no point in continuing to write books after you're dead, cause nobody reads. But then I guess that's true on earth, too. Performance is where it's at. That's why I started this nightclub act for stiffs. Stand-up comedy. Mostly I parody myself, since people's feelings are so easily hurt here in limbo. Who knows why. Anyway, here's a sample of my work.

The New Age Chandler

She was one of them middle-aged, crystal-toting doyens from the West Valley, who'd been around the channeling circuit far too long. She was drinking carrot juice from a martini glass like she meant it, her inner child plastered across her mug like a badge of cheap vulnerability. But I knew she wanted to be hurt as much as I wanted to get in touch with my hurting impulses. I'd just been at a bad shiatsu session and my chakras were way out of alignment. My yin-yang must have been right-on though, cause the punch connected, blackening her third eye and sending her sprawling across the coffee table and into the hot tub at the back of the room. As she rose from the steaming water I could see the animal spittle forming at the corners of her mouth. She looked like some primitive life form rising from the sea. Apparently my little birthday present had sent her spiralling back through several karmic lifetimes. She was mean, de-evolved and looking for trouble. Who wouldn't be. She was gonna

have to start all over. Too bad for her, I thought. Me, I needed a tofu steak and some wheat grass juice. Then I was gonna see a guy about a polarity problem.

The Businessman Chandler

It was a cadre of multi-national multiple-market-driven investors, who believed in an activity-based modular production structure as a buffer against rampant value-chain variation. And they were gonna do something about it. Their CEO had got his systems people together to re-engineer their core competencies and revamp the root-cost-driven behavior that had lowered the corporate bottom line. If anyone knew who was responsible for the death of Carmelo's sister, it was someone in this board room. I could tell by the bulges beneath the Gucci handkerchiefs that a number of the middle-management types were packing. We were in for some high corporate hardball. That's when the dame walked in, her lips red as the doctored books of a one-time bull brokerage cartel fallen into the productivity pit of hierarchical decision-making and non-binding arbitration that typified the early 90's. She immediately asked me to stop speaking in hyphenated prose. Having called my bluff, she smirked and swigged at her bottle of mineral water, preening like Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*. It didn't do a damn thing for my libido and she knew it. We were gonna get along just fine.

The Hillbilly Chandler

She was standing by the outhouse. Her teeth were full of metal and shone like combine blades in the moonlight, like she might eat a feller for lunch if his harvest come in afore hers. By the tire tracks around her yaller eyes I could tell her moral character was softer than a boiled pig ear, and that she probably got a whole flock o' banjo pickin, melon-headed younguns tucked away in the holler. I'd seen her around before, or at least plenty of hokum dames like her. She was soused then and she was soused now, moving them fat-back chawing jaws slower than your barnyard cat gnawing on a grindstone. If anybody in this valley knew where the dough was hid it was her. She could smell money like a weasal rousting out a polecat.

Anyway, it goes on and on like that. There's *the Polish Immigrant Chandler*, *the Deconstructionist Chandler*, *The Children's Talk Show Chandler*, *the Hindu Chandler*, *the Old Testament Chandler*. It's all based on the fact that a little shift here or there in the weave of the space/time continuum and any of us could have easily ended up someone else,

divorced from the particular karmic debt that made us who we were. In other words, a lot of who I thought I was, was defined by circumstances and events that had nothing to do with me or my intentions, and the word 'Chandleresque,' that adjective of which I was so proud in my lifetime, was more or less an etymological accident, and had in fact become a kind of virus infecting the earthly prosaic world, rendering my precious primal, if fabricated, human drama into a pop cliché, veritable pap for the masses who hadn't a clue as to what really lay behind it.

This fact hit home hard one day -- I'd been having a steak and a beer with Bill Shakespeare and Johnny Milton. We were sitting around after dinner like dead people do, lamenting our mistakes and drinking I. W. Harper on the rocks, talking about the direction our work had taken since we died. A couple of others joined us. I think it was that Jean Genet fella asked me how I felt about the state of hard-boiled fiction in the 90's and the vast number of imitators that 'genre writing' tends to attract. I couldn't tell if it was a subtle insult or a serious query, especially coming from a fey thug who'd conned his way out of the slammer writing fancy masturbation fantasies for the French literati.

It was that word 'genre' that got my goat. Hell, it wasn't even a genre when I was doing it. Or if it was, at least it used to mean something. But now it seems the whole hard-boiled thing doesn't mean anything at all -- just a catalogue of gestures -- a body on the floor here, or a dame with a drink and a gun in her hand over there. In other words 'hard-boiled' has become no more than a garbage can for fashion statements, where a bunch of snappy looking kids without a wrinkle to their brows and no experience to cop to, can run through a series of magazine cover poses and get paid for it. They probably get laid for being deep, too. Hell, everybody in the movies today looks like they're twenty years old. Give me Bobby Mitchum anytime -- *there* was a guy who could play the the existential hero and not look like he'd just been shopping in Soho for his philosophical 'look'. After all, it takes more than some sampled jaded voice-over to buy you a set of character lines or a silhouette under the street lamp of Existential Loneliness.

Back then we didn't have anything to imitate. We were postwar men who didn't think much about life, except to get through it with some dignity, without losing our minds to paranoia. These kids today don't have any moral ledge to fall from -- they grew up sucking television sets for breakfast, so *everything* is a form of acting to them. Hell, even writing is acting these days. They think a pose can stand in for a whole philosophy, and a gesture can take the place of a story. Problem is, they're right. And that's what bugs me. Cause if 'hard-boiled' has come to be seen as little more than a sign system, well I guess I'm as much to blame for the evolution of this simulacrum-driven farce called modern life as any French critic.

Not to sound meglomaniacal but I *was* sort of in on the beginning of this whole thing. See, all I wanted was to be a hack writer. Partly to cover up my prissy anglicisms, and partly because this was America, a market-driven economy, and I needed a product to get over. My job at the department store sucked, so I drank. One day I was peeling my face off the local bar when I looked in the mirror. What I saw was a misogynist con-man with an attitude. Then it dawned on me -- *that was the answer*. Attitude would be my product. See, back then it was the beginning of the age of media -- television and hollywood -- things were gonna change in the world and I knew it. You only had to walk around the streets of LA to see that style was rapidly replacing content. I decided to exploit that change.

I knew it wouldn't be long before nothing made sense. Hardly anything made sense as it was. But people were dying for sense, and you could sell it to them in the form of plot. Now this might sound funny, but personally I didn't have much taste for plot. I don't think the world really works that way. I think it was Gertrude Stein who said there are only seven different stories anyway, and you can't avoid being part of one of them. So why think about it. Besides you could create the illusion of a plot simply by maintaining a constant state of anticipation. If you made things convoluted enough, people wouldn't be able to tell what was going on anyway. It was a neat trick composed of postures, one liners, soundbites, clever metaphors.

Thus I developed my narrative system: Avoid too much subtlety; ground metaphors in recognizable cliches; imbue the world with an aura of meaning; make everything threatening and/or humorously significant, so that it shimmers, like a garish diner after 48 hours of living on coffee and bourbon and no sleep. Let style be the neon sign, so to speak, in the dark night of the human soul. And what that neon sign should do is shed light on a world where one already knows what's going to happen-- that's where the blasé, jaded part comes in -- the 'hard-boiled' thing. It was a narrative process based on typecasting, speculation, and conjecture. Everything is *a priori*, and thus predictable. Of course, in those days you could do that, you didn't have your PC moralisms, you didn't have to worry about whether some hi-tone society princess was abused as a kid or some low-life thug was an incest victim. There were no individuals, only types, and those types were inherently low-down and evil.

The rule of thumb was don't give anyone a break, let them be as ugly and vile as they want to be. Of course this 'attitude' thing is probably why I never got laid; even in my own stories. But then some people say I don't like women all that much and constantly portrayed them as two-faced betrayers. This point comes up all too often at my weekly Hard-Boiled Anonymous encounter group. I go to this thing cause I have a lot of problems to work out. It may be therapeutic but it's not pretty. It's like Sartre said in *No Exit* -- hell is being eternally

locked in a room with all the clowns you had to deal with in life, forever rubbing your nose in your own rhetorical *denouements* -- sort of like a catfight in the afterlife.

Like Hammett over there -- that party boy with the big mouth and all the connections -- he wouldn't be nothing if he didn't have Bogart backing him up on celluloid. And he calls *me* a media whore. Or David Goodis -- a hack with a head for cheap cliches and an appetite for vice. And what about that psychopath Thompson -- nothing but a poster boy for a bunch of punks and other pseudo-decadent wannabes. Each one of them thinks they're some kind of wheel in the real world, gloating over their influence, or the re-publication of some stupid pulp story, counting up their take on posthumous movie contracts. I say enjoy it while you can suckers, cause it's just a fad. They don't see how everything is fucked-up. How we created the world we condemned. And they say death is blind.

It's a sad scene here in the afterlife. A bunch of stiff fucks in fedoras and overcoats complaining about fifty-year-old freelance paychecks and badmouthing the French. I don't know why they're so down on the French -- I say, hell, if it weren't for the French there wouldn't be any word for *Film Noir*, and most of us would have been forgotten. Then that Chuck Williford had to put in his two bits, saying all I ever did was rewrite the same stories all the time and it was no wonder I spent my late years grasping at straws. I called him a two-bit imitator of Mickey Spillaine. And it just went on and on and on. Even in Limbo you spend all your time stabbing each other in the back. Death ain't what it used to be, I tell you. But then maybe it never was. You reap what you sow. I just wish I would have gone with something more pastorage, but then it's too late for that. So next time you have a fetish to light up a cigarette under a street lamp, and brood over human dignity, don't look at me. And if you want my advice, stay out of the writing game. It sucked then and it sucks now. If publishing houses were restaurants, they'd probably make us parade around out front with signs on our backs saying "For chumps only."

SYLVIA PLATH RETURNS

-Lorraine Schein

Daddy, Daddy, you bastard, I'm through...

Whoops! I guess I'm not. Where am I? This isn't London, is it? If this is London again in the winter, I'll have to do it all again. (*Reaches for knob on stove.*) Damn! My head is still stuck in the oven!

Were you expecting my All-American girl look with the short blonde bob? But in those last, hard months, I grew my hair long, into a braid, like a Delphic priestess. It was easier because of the babies -- a relief not to have to keep up appearances any longer.

Acceleration was my downfall. I was always trying to go faster, too fast. Ariel. Always trying to speed up the pace; of publishing, prizes, success, conquests of men. I thought if I could go fast enough, I could escape being a woman, escape the fate of being a woman poet. Women poets are encouraged to self-destruct or be destroyed by the gas of indifference.

Why, there's my friend Anne, talking to Emma Goldman. Hi, Anne! Guess you finally did it with the car? -- AND your Shrink! Congratulations!

No!! Ted is Poet Laureate now? That bastard! I hear he's still fucking around with suicidal women. I should have bit Ted somewhere more sensitive than his cheek that first time we kissed at Cambridge. But how could I have known? How could I have known he'd leave me for someone with a bigger oven? Emma, you want to say something?

OY VEY, SYLVIA. YOU MANAGED TO FREE YOURSELF FROM A BOURGEOISIE RELATIONSHIP, BUT WOULDNT IT HAVE BEEN BETTER TO BE FREE FROM THE START? FREE LOVE, DARLINK! VAT? VAT? YOU KNOW I CANT HEAR YOU WITH THAT OVEN ON YOUR HEAD! HAVEN'T YOU EVER HEARD OF FREE LOVE, BUBBALAH? MEN ARE ALL THE SAME, THEY WANT MARRIAGE-SLAVES! WE GHOSTS MUST ORGANIZE AND RESIST BEING SUMMONED BY CAPITALIST MEDIUMS. FOR THIS GROUP, THOUGH, WE MAKE AN EXCEPTION -- AN INVOCATION BY A NICE ANARCHIST BOY AND HIS FRIENDS. WHY, THEY EVEN CALLED UP SHAKESPEARE! LET ME GO TALK TO HIM. 'BYE, SYLVIA.

(Sylvia returns -- removes glasses, replaces oven)

Why, it *is* Shakespeare! Bet he never had anything in the *New Yorker*. He's not even a college graduate, much less someone who was at Cambridge like me!

How COULD you Unbearables criticize the poetry editor of the *New Yorker*? I worked so hard to get my work in there and you ignorant slobs picket them! Well, you'll never be published there now, never! Hahaha!

I wonder if Alice Quinn would like these immortal words from my diary?

"Do you realize the illicit sensuous delight I get from picking my nose? I always have, ever since I was a child. There are so many subtle variations of sensation. A delicate, pointed nailed fifth finger can catch under dry scabs and flakes of mucous in the nostril and draw them out to be looked at, crumbled between fingers, and flicked to the floor in minute crusts, or a heavier, determined forefinger can reach up and smear down and out the soft, resilient, elastic greenish- yellow smallish blobs of mucous, roll them round and jelly like between thumb and forefinger, and spread them on the under-surface of a desk or a chair where they will harden

into organic crusts. How many desks and chairs have I thus secretively befouled since childhood? Or sometimes there will be blood mingled with the mucous: in dry brown scabs, or bright sudden wet red on the finger that scraped too rudely the nasal membranes. God, what a sexual satisfaction! It is absorbing to look with new sudden eyes on the old worn habits: to see a sudden luxurious and pestilential "snotgreen sea," and shiver with the shock of recognition."

Whoops, I'm fading now. Must have been that last graphic description. I'll leave you with the words I hope most to be remembered by:

My name is Sylvia Plath Plath Plath
I'm filled with venom and wrath wrath wrath
Myself is what I want to kill kill kill
That way I'll never be over the hill hill hill
Into an oven I put my head head head
And now I am very dead dead dead --
You'd put your head in an oven too too too
If you were married to Ted Hughes Hughes Hughes.

BUKOWSKI

-Joe Maynard

Hey! Hey! You didn't think this limp-dick of an event go by without Bukowski vomiting on Collette's shoes, did ya?

Yeah, I know a thing or two now that I'm a spirit. Like how big everyone's cunt is, who's got the clap, and how many gross exaggerations that plantenga character has put over about his so-called sex life. But Unbearables, after all I said when I was alive, I still don't understand why you group of posers insist on hangin' around each other like a bunch of boyscouts. That ain't howta write! Gimme a room full o postal workers and a rent-a-pussy from Houston Street and I got 150 pages, easy! So get to work, cuz when you're on this side it's all look, no touch -- ya pecker don't feel nothin'; it's up, it's down; it's down, it's up -- God still don't give a damn, you never reach the light at the end of the tunnel, and you still get junk mail.

3 GREAT MEN DEAD

-Michael Randall

3 great men dead
in the last 12 months
Fellini, Sun Ra,
Charles Bukowski

and though the world's
never been much
it now seems less
than ever,
diminished by much,
much more than I wish to calculate
on this paper cocktail napkin

everywhere the ill wind blows
3 great men dead
and I am dying too.

they were old dogs who kept it
til the end
unafraid to be difficult, raw, sentimental,
contrary, truthful,
unafraid to be
unmarketable in a world
where you're nothing if not
easily understood
by a 12-yr-old crack addict
in Cincinatti
or Taiwan.

and who does *that* anymore
in this world suddenly gone
small and sour? who
keeps on punching

when the legs are gone?
no one here in this bar,
that's for certain.
not these tiny men
who suck beer into their
tiny heads and
go home.

I suck mine down
order another
& for the first time
in quite a while,
since the old days
of speed and bourbon cocktails,
I find myself wishing
for heaven --

some celestial sphere
where Bukowski drives to the track
w/Jesus and
drinks good red with Gustav Mahler
and Al Capone,
where Fellini fingers Margaret Mead
in the back of a dark movie-house
showing *Fall of the House of Usher*

while Sun Ra conducts
the largest orchestra in the universe
in a joyous lament
to this tiny world
filled w/tiny men and women
spinning always faster
and moving always
slowly closer
to Saturn
and the sun.