

The METAPHYSICAL TIMES

Volume XI Number 4

are here!



it's Magic

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METAPHYSICAL TIMES

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COVER

View of the Milky Way galaxy provided by the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope

***Our next issue, with the theme of Power Places
coming when there is time and space.***

MAGIC

Oren Pierce, Guest Editor



Jesus raising the dead with a wand,
Roman catacomb, 3rd century

“Magic” is not itself a magic word, but just a word to which people attach all sorts of meanings and use to describe a full range of events ranging from the pleasantly unusual, romantic, and gratifying through tricks of misdirection and manipulation all the way to remote sensing, out-of-body travel, on-the-spot multiplication of loaves and fish, levitation, and what you will.

Faced with that confusion and my task as guest editor of a magazine issue with the theme of magic, I recalled right away the beginning words of that magical book, the original old testament of Jews and Christians, the very first words of which words

say that in the beginning was the word. Some say the word was God, others Gog, or Dog, but the point is that the word was magic. The word created.

***Words themselves were magic.
And they still are, or try to be, in
prayer, in poetry, and in cursing.
Especially in lying.***

It has become clear lately, that for most practical and political purposes if you repeat something three times, it becomes true.

Recent research shows the even more startling fact that placebos, when given to treat a disease, are around thirty percent effective, which is good for any medicine; but studies also show that placebos are effective even if you know they are placebos. You may well help by wishing or praying to, and it may be important that a doctor hands you those sugar pills, but the more startling results of the study show that if not only do you have a good chance of a cure from a placebo even if you know it is just a sugar pill, but you also will get the negative side-effects of the medicine you know you are not really getting. I call THAT magic.

But I still do not understand it. Maybe magic is just the name for what we don't understand.

So for me and other semi-literate civilians to get a hand on or our heads around that word, who better than word people like our chosen authors. Trust them, they are professionals, some with Doctorates. Trust them then to put magic into words, and believe them if you want to.

I myself, am an amateur and a child among words, so I will pass the task on to the more experienced writers we assemble here and now, before your very eyes.

Abracadabra.

Oren Pierce is the imaginary and pseudonymous author of the Nowella and Threadbear stories, as well as a Zen Badminton player who instructs students to play with their non dominant hand, and advocates what he calls “Mindlessness”, or “Other Handedness” in thought and activity.

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A photograph of a stone archway set into a wall. The archway contains a carved stone face with a crown and a beard. The surrounding area is covered in moss and green plants. A rainbow is visible in the background, arching over the scene.

TA - DA
Just Add Water

Publisher, Metaphysical Times

We live on a planet that depends on a regular, plentiful, water supply to thrive. We are seeing more and more

erratic weather. In the last one hundred years we have watched Onondaga Lake in Central New York turn from a beautiful healthy lake to one that become dead and poisonous. When I was a graduate student in Ohio we would sit by the Cuyahoga River and throw matches at the water to watch it burn from the pollution.

This summer, I lived it first hand. We had a drought. The weather played some other magic tricks on us. Warm weather too early, a frost too late. That along with the dry season has turned the fruit on 112 Pear trees to a few pears on five or six trees. We still aren't ready to be in the pear "business." That's a couple of years away.

We were the luckiest people in our neighborhood. Our neighbors lost apricots and peaches that they would have sold commercially.

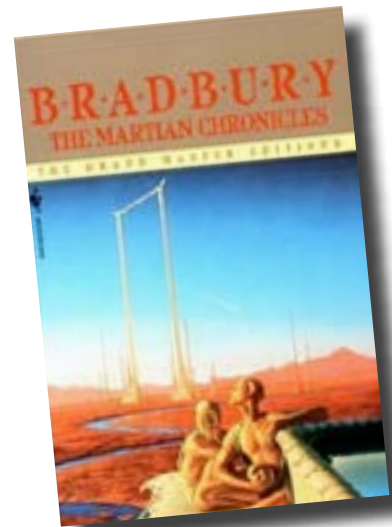
Our well went dry on a daily basis from watering everything we could reach with a hose and carrying water even further in big plastic cans. My flowers were a luxury that received what water fell on them while I hosed the Raspberries. Perhaps too late in the summer to save much of our garden, we bought a 550 gallon water tank and had it filled. The highest spot for it for gravity feed was in the front yard.

My "Sea-Monkey" mind is still alive

The water tank looked like a circus wagon to me and at least we had fun with it.



I moved from reading my brother's comics to a fascination with speculative fiction; possibly too much. Isaac Azimov, my hero, was a mathematician and wrote popular science and science fiction. In the 1970s he wrote seriously about the dangers of ruining our environment. Of course Ray Bradbury's "The Martian Chronicles" was a favorite, and I read it more than once.



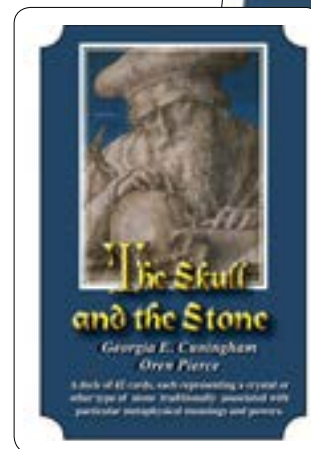
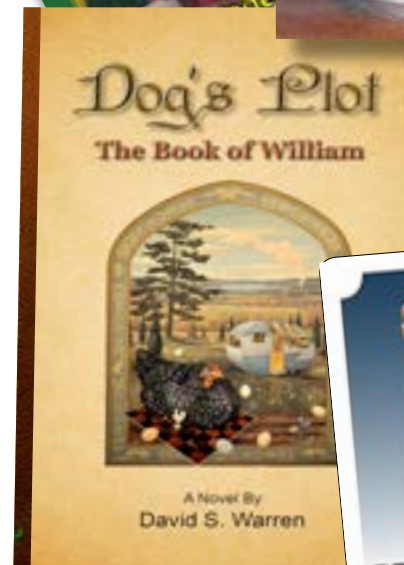
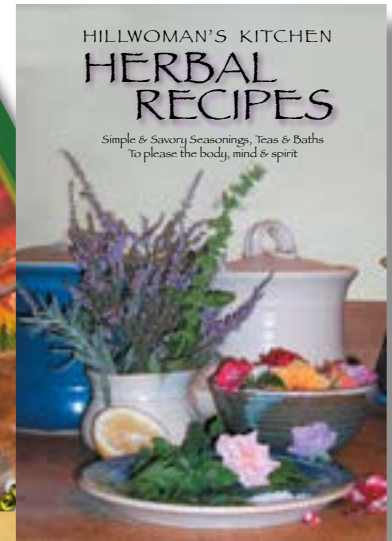
I wonder if the Martians may have destroyed their own planet. Did they have water and then loose it? Why are there canals? How very similar Mars is to Earth, except for the water . **Can we become another Mars?** Are we already becoming another Mars? Has all evidence of life just disappeared from this red planet, except for "the canals"?

There are people who claim that it is not our reckless irresponsibility for the changing climate. Look at the statistics, year after year we have record warmer temperatures, too much rain in one area and too little in another. Floods, droughts, high temperatures. Are we ruining our health in an overcrowded world, locked in air-conditioned offices, houses, and automobiles without the benefits of fresh air and healthy, natural spaces, that develop negative ions?

**What are we doing right now
to save ourselves and our planet?**

Magic

IS IN OUR HANDS



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Endless Coincidence



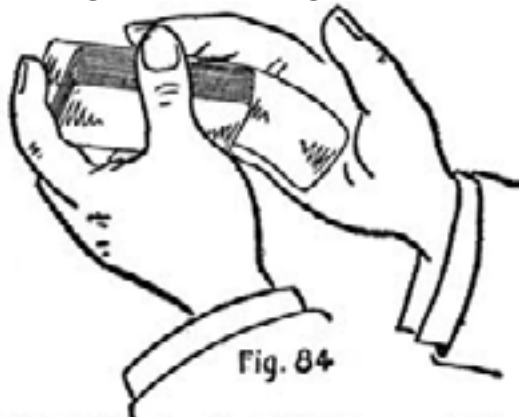
The Cardsharps (1594) by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio

by David S. Warren

Endless Coincidence

by David S. Warren

The Magician's Magician



Copyright, by S. W. Erdnase, 1902.

Back in the early seventies, not long before Ricky Jay would write his break-out book about "Cards as Weapons", he was one of my students in a Cornell freshman course called "Writing from Experience". He had already experienced freshman life at a few other colleges, and would spend only slightly longer at Cornell than Houdini spent chained in a coffin at the bottom of New York Harbor.... but before slipping out, Richard Jay did submit one piece of writing: the monologue of a freak-show barker who pulls us in, only to violate our willing suspension of sympathy, by making it perfectly clear that WE the drooling gapers are the true Freaks... fascinated by the projections of of our own misshapen souls. It wouldn't have gone over well at the Freak Show, but the truth is beautiful enough, so I read it to the class.

Ricky Jay moved on to tending bar and throwing cards at the Royal Palm bar in Collegetown, learned writing and magic from books and mirrors; later published, not only "Cards as Weapons", but also scholarly articles and coffee-table books on magicians, freaks and prodigies. He appeared occasionally as a writer and a subject in the New Yorker. He played a card-shark and other under-world devils in the movies. and advised the movie industry itself about the business of illusion, through his consulting business, "Deceptive Practices".

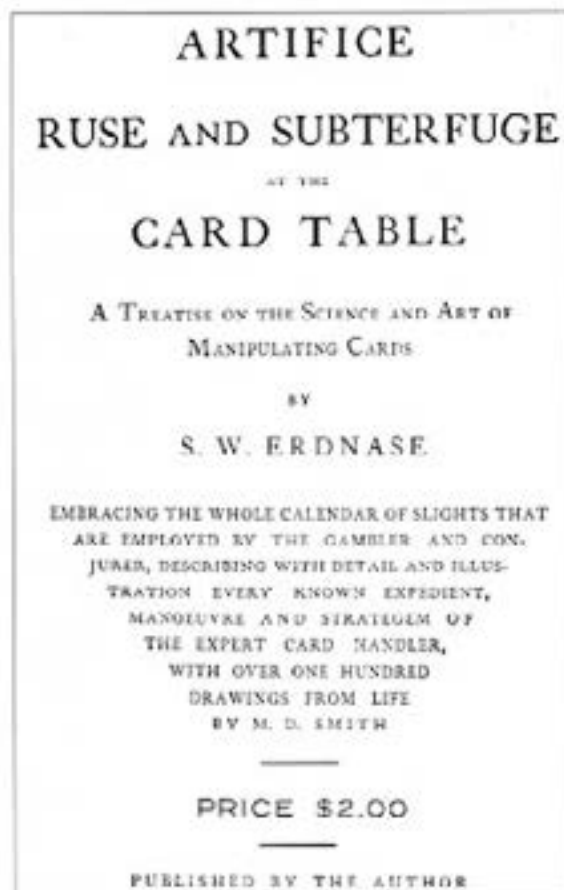
In fact, Ricky Jay must be the best known magician after Harry Potter, and one of the best card handlers ever but his own role model, the magician's magician, and the ultimate Expert at the card table, seems to be the great and

mysterious S. W. Erdnase.

Or rather, the man who, under that name, wrote the classic book on card handling, which is generally published as "The Expert at the Card table," although the original title was "Artifice, Ruse and Subterfuge at the Card Table a Treatise on the Science and Art of Manipulating Cards....." Erdnase enthusiasts in the online magic forums refer to it simply as "The Expert" or "Erdnase", as if the book were the man.

Whoever S.W. Erdnase really was, he had a great cloak of invisibility. More than a hundred years since the publication of the book, magicians have not been able to agree on just who wrote it. That question would be less important if the book itself were not an extraordinary piece of literature.

The title page is a full spread and leaves absolutely no doubt what it is about.



Title page of first edition

The preface of the book takes up where the title left off and then spills generously into an introduction: all so sage, wry, and humorous that some Erdnasians have convinced themselves that the man was actually Mark Twain even though everybody knows, or else should know, that Mark Twain was actually Sam Clemens; and Clemens himself was half Huck Finn, and half Tom Sawyer:

"We betray no confidences in publishing this book, having only ourselves to thank for what we know. Our tuition was received in the cold school of experience. We started in with the trusting nature of a fledgling, and a calm assurance born of overweening faith in our own potency. We bucked the tiger voluntarily, and censure no one for the inevitable result. A self-satisfied unlicked cub with a fairly fat bank roll was too good a thing to be passed up. We naturally began to imbibe wisdom in copious draughts at the customary sucker rates, but the jars to our pocket-book caused far less anguish than the heartrending jolts to our insufferable conceit. After the awakening our education progressed through close application and constant study of the game, and the sum of our present knowledge is proffered in this volume, for any purpose it may answer, to friend and foe, to the wise and the foolish, to the good and the bad, to all alike, with but one reservation,--that he has the price".

The Detective

The author can be found right there in his book, unless the book is artless. "All art is autobiography", wrote the Erdnase investigator, David Alexander, suggesting that he could cut a decent profile of the Erdnase author from the evidence of the book. Alexander had actually worked for years as a private investigator, part of the time contracted to the Los Angeles police department, plus he had many years of experience as a stage pickpocket, a card and coin handler, free-hand silhouette cutter, curator, editor, and writer. Alexander was the official biographer of the Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry. And he published (under his own name) a little book on the art of picking pockets..... not available outside the brotherhood of magicians. As a volunteer enforcer of professional ethics, he had spent many years tracking and exposing various frauds who used tricks of the profession to defraud widows and others willing to suspend disbelief and pay money for messages from the dead. Stage magic is a work of fiction, and lies are the worst enemy of fiction. So a fully qualified and motivated inside expert was on the Erdnase case.

Others had already observed that Erdnase is not a real name at all..... but that S.W. Erdnase spelled backwards, is E. S. Andrews.

As a matter of fact, an E.S. Andrews did exist in the general area and time in which the Erdnase book was published; and this person was known to gamble.

Many Erdnase seekers have needed to look no further.

Martin Gardner, the long time Scientific American puzzle-master, who wrote the introduction to a modern edition of The Expert and co-authored a book with two others on Erdnase, argued that Erdnase was Milton Franklin Andrews: a small-time gambler and card-shark who had dropped out of school, lived with his mother, and at the age of thirty-three, having been run to ground due to his crooked dealings, shot himself.

But Alexander insisted, and it is easy to agree, that a destitute, small time gambler under the age of thirty could NOT have written lines like this:

"The vagaries of luck or chance have improved the professional card player with a certain knowledge that his more respected brother of the stock exchange possesses, viz.--manipulation is more profitable than speculation; so to make both ends meet, and incidentally a good living, he also performs his part with the shears when the lambs come to market."

Before David and Richard Kyle, who assisted him, had begun any serious investigations, others had observed that the name S.W. Erdnase can also be read as an anagram of W. E. Sanders. David began investigating a W. E. Sanders who was a copper miner on several levels, the son of a Montana Senator, and in the right places at the right time. He had studied German, Greek and Shakespeare in the East, on his way to becoming a mining engineer, mine owner, and oil explorer, caereering for many years through the mountain West from Chicago to California.

Notice, as did Alexander, that in the German language, which likes to join words end to end, Erdnase means "Earth Nose".

Read Sanders diaries and you will note one entry that lists the items he has packed for an up-coming trip, including five packs of cards.

In nineteen ninety-one Alexander published an article on the Sanders/Erdnase connection in the magicians journal Genii, titled:

" The Magician as Detective
New light on Erdnase " .

He also presented his conclusions at a magicians convention in Los Angeles, profiling a man clever enough to have deliberately made the fake backward spelling shift to lead attention away from the anagram. Ricky Jay, who himself has said that he doesn't like to offer himself around among clustering magicians.... happened to be there anyway, came up to David after the talk, and complemented him on the presentation.

But David hadn't convinced all of those who were partial to an explanation involving one of the Andrews suspects, Just wanted it to be Mark Twain, or preferred the ongoing mystery.

David Alexander continued his Erdnase research, performing as a magician, and putting together a fine collection of works by mostly twentieth century silhouette cutting by his mentor and others.

In 2007 he and his wife Cassidy moved to Aurora Illinois, where a friend had recruited him to help reorganize and "fix" a new hands-on science museum. Cassidy is a professional portrait artist, who, as a volunteer, working on short notice, started doing portraits of slain Chicago police officers. Portraits with an illusion of three dimensions, blood in the cheeks, and light in the eyes. She could do great wanted posters.

But no sooner was the science museum on a new track, than the Great Recession hit, funding was cut....and of course the museum was running and didn't need to be set up anymore anyway.... so David was freed to pursue Erdnase.

The Vagaries of Luck

David Alexander, whom I never actually met, graduated from the same high school in the same year as Kristal Forest, to whom I was once married.

Looking at his high school memorial page he noticed that Kristal was listed as deceased or missing, so he went to Google and soon came up with my blog post regarding her, which you might read some day : <http://dogs-plot.blogspot.com/2010/08/kristal-forest-dali-lama-and-me.html>

A few years ago, Kristal disappeared out in Arizona, and was presumed to have been murdered. But he didn't write to me as Detective/ magician, about the mystery of her vanishing. We were already



ognized the difficulty of the subject, and said that he had shared my blog posts with a few friends students as a model of good writing.

If I wanted to ease up close to a writer and pick his pocket, I might say things like that. I trusted him anyway,

That began an exchange of emails about family secrets, Manachian characters, borderline personalities, writing, and magic.

His emails to me sometimes ended only because Cassidy had dinner ready.

December 2010 came and I hadn't heard from David in a month or more, so I went to his Facebook page.

His magician friends had been posting there, giving bits of information.

One day David and Cassidy had driven to a rental property they owned, where the tenant had reported a leak in the ceiling, David went up to the attic to investigate, and he didn't come down.

An uninsulated water pipe in the cold attic had burst and wet the wiring, which was apparently also poorly insulated, causing death by electrocution, though it took six weeks to be recognized as the official cause of death.

A meaningless dead end, but hard to get out of my mind.....especially since I am actually a roofer, If I had been a REAL life friend and lived in Aurora, Illinois instead of Aurora, New York....I could have been the man in the attic.

Dead-end thinking, and that will be the end of it, but when you die, you begin to reappear in stories, and after David died he continued to be cited in the Genii Erdnase forum. David had discovered that Sanders once served as librarian of the Montana

Occan's Razor

Historical society, where he was in charge of arranging the Society publications. It was that fact especially which motivated Marty Demerest and others to extend David's investigations.

Eventually, Genii magazine published an article by Marty Demerest with more details about Sanders and an endorsement of Sanders as the Erdnase candidate.

W.E. Sanders died in 1935 out in Berkley California, where he was last involved in oil exploration.

Here's a picture of him as a young man in Montana, sitting on seems to be a buffalo robe thrown over a shipping trunk.. What are those white dots all over his suit? Is that beard for real? What arcane symbol is on his tie? Somebody should write a book about that Wag.



Wilbur Edgerton Sanders in Montana

So how could David Alexander solve the Erdnase mystery a few years ahead of the Scientific American puzzle master and way ahead of so many other people who had given a lot of thought to the question?

David Alexander claimed that he always used "Occam's razor" in his investigation.

Occams razor, as you learned long ago, and I learned recently, is the basis of the scientific method. A common summation of William from Ockam's alleged rule, is that the simplest explanation of anything is generally the right one. But the text by William of Ockam can be disappointing, because it mentions no razor, and William didn't have just one simple, clean-cutting rule. As Alexander points out, when you proceed from a working assumption, but encounter anomalies, you might need a more complex explanation.

Seek endless coincidence, says Alexander. That's a good and simple rule; it stands by itself.

Those are just the rules of common sense and open mindedness, but everyone says and agrees that common sense and open mindedness are rare. It takes a strong minded person like you, me, or David Alexander, one who is "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" as John Keats said.

He called that high tolerance for ambiguity "Negative Capability".

But Keats himself pointed out in the same sentence, that when this particular genius is followed closely, beauty overcomes all other considerations: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" said Keats, or at least his Grecian Urn did.....and anyway T.S. Eliot dismissed the line as a crock of un-poetry, empty of meaning. And you wouldn't think it a particularly useful working basis for science or police procedure.

And then you might need to think again.

It is a really cool and convenient coincidence that Martin Gardner (the math puzzler and Erdnase expert we spoke of, who coauthored the book we have not read, that proposed one of the Andrews candidates as the true wizard of Erdnase) wrote an article in the

The Real Alexander

Scientific American, with the title "Is Beauty Truth and Truth Beauty?"

In fact, that very question was a long running theme of Gardner's career at the Scientific American. The idea would seem to violate the traditional separation of Art and Science, but we learn from Gardener and from the book he reviews that in modern science, as in the complex simplicity and invisible symmetry of nature, beauty IS truth.

All is endless fractal coincidence; the parts continually resemble the whole, as the atom resembles the solar system. O.M.G !

That Beauty is Truth is good to know, even if the meaning keeps clouding into ambiguity, and even if it is not necessarily ALL you need to know for life here below.



Who was the real David Alexander? How should I know? How should I who never met him, know what to make of the fact that his name happens to be a reverse, trans-gender shift of the name of Alexandra David, who wrote and published under her married name, Alexandra David Neel, one of my favorite books -- "Magic and Mystery in Tibet " in which she witnesses Yogis who can melt blocks of ice by sitting on them, and other marvels? Which makes me wonder who was David Alexander that he he could sit on the couch with his friend for half an hour, talking of this and that.... and then suddenly pull a five pound block of ice from under his hat? And how did he manage, at will, to pull a bird cage out of his pants? Was there a bird in it? Was it alive?

Why a bird cage of all things? Why did he do magic anyway?

Well, who wouldn't, except that they couldn't?

Given a mentor or two, some professional secrets, a lot of practice and fake confidence, even a shy boy like me might be able to get a traveling magician gig and use it as a cover for free range secret agent work in ports around the world, making new friends squeal with delight , and making fools of spies, impostors, hecklers, and common pests, all by means of subterfuge, ruse, and artifice.....able to steal the shirt off a man's back, to profile a suspect with just scissors and paper, to communicate across time and space, and to confront massive ambiguity, without taking it too seriously.



Publisher's Note

The biography, flamboyancy, and writing style of Mark Twain and some bits and pieces of information about his friendship with Milton Franklin Andrews, has led me to believe that Mark Twain was the ghost writer of S.W. Erdnase's publication. It has been noted in his biography that Mark Twain also had a constant interest in card games and billiards during the time frame of S.W. Erdnase's writing. I am researching this consideration and I will get back to you in a later edition of the Metaphysical times with a written report.

Georgia E. Warren

In the Cards

an excerpt from
An Illustrated Memoir by Annie Campbell



My relationship with Yarnell fizzled and died without any regrets on either side, and the daycare business got me through the rest of the winter. Now that it was spring,

I was happy to return to house painting.

I joined some old friends on a different paint crew. We usually ate lunch at Noyes Lodge: a big cafeteria on the Cornell Campus. During lunch one day, I was introduced to Ricky, an eccentric magician with devilish smiling eyes. He sat hunched over his food, complaining that life was “a beating” and that he had no place to live. He carried on a rapid discourse about life and magic while constantly flipping a quarter smoothly and expertly over and under his fingers. Sometimes the coin disappeared into thin air, sometimes he magically retrieved it behind my ear.

I imagined what fun it would be to have a magician around the house and said, “You can stay at my house if you don’t mind kids.”

“I hate kids,” Ricky cackled, “but I would love to stay there.”

My brother John had gone off to the University of Wisconsin, so I had an extra room. Ricky moved in that night and put his few belongings in the small bedroom downstairs. Then he settled down on the mattress that served as a couch in the living room. We talked and I showed him the record collection that Leo had given me. I never knew why Leo had parted with his beloved records, but I was grateful to have them. Ricky, who knew a lot about music, went nuts over my fine R&B collection, and we spent some late nights listening to records.

Ricky the kid-hater and Storn really hit it off. He entertained Storn with card tricks and little windup toys – his “assistants,” he called them – which he used in some of magic tricks.

“I can do tricks too!” announced two-and-a-half year-old Storn. He flapped his small hands back and forth in front of his chest like a little door opening and closing while rapidly popping his tongue in and out, and blinking his sparkly blue eyes as fast as he could. Ricky beamed.

After a B.B. King concert in Cornell, Ricky and I talked to B.B.’s bass player. Ricky told him about my record collection, and even though it was late, invited him to our house. We stayed up for hours listening to old rhythm and blues records. I asked Ricky to do some tricks for Bass-man. Out came the cards and one of his windup toys – a frog. Ricky shuffled the cards, which was a show in itself. The cards cascaded like a waterfall, tumbling from one hand to the other.

Quickly he squared the deck into neat pile. Bass-man watched transfixed, as the cards flew in a perfect arc from left hand to right, back and forth like an accordion.

“Here, pick a card, any card and show it to Annie but not to me,” said Ricky as he held out a perfect fan of equally spaced cards toward Bass-man. One card wiggled in and out of the fan, begging to be chosen. Bass-man regarded it suspiciously and refused to pick a card.

“OK, shuffle as many times as you like,” said Ricky, chuckling as he closed the fan and handed the deck to him.

Bass-man shuffled and cut the deck quite expertly, then showed me his chosen card, returned it to the deck, shuffled again, and handed it back to Ricky. With one big sweep of his hand, Ricky made a perfect half circle with all the cards evenly spaced face down on the floor.

Ricky wound up the jumping frog assistant and placed it in the center of the semicircle. The three of us leaned forward on our wooden chairs and watched as the frog hopped here and there and finally landed on a card. Ricky picked up the card and showed it to us without looking at it himself.

“Is it your card?” he asked.

“No!” Bass-man said triumphantly. “It is NOT my card!”

Ricky feigned surprise. He placed the card face down on the center of the circle, took the Bass-man’s beer bottle, and gave the card a hard thunk with the bottom of the bottle.

“Well it’s your card now,” Ricky said.

Bass-man turned it over.

“Sur nuf it is, man!” he shouted, wild-eyed. “How the hell d’you do that? Bet you can’t do that again!”

The frog picked the right card two more times. Bass-man looked edgy.

“Okay man, lemme see you do that thing one more time!”

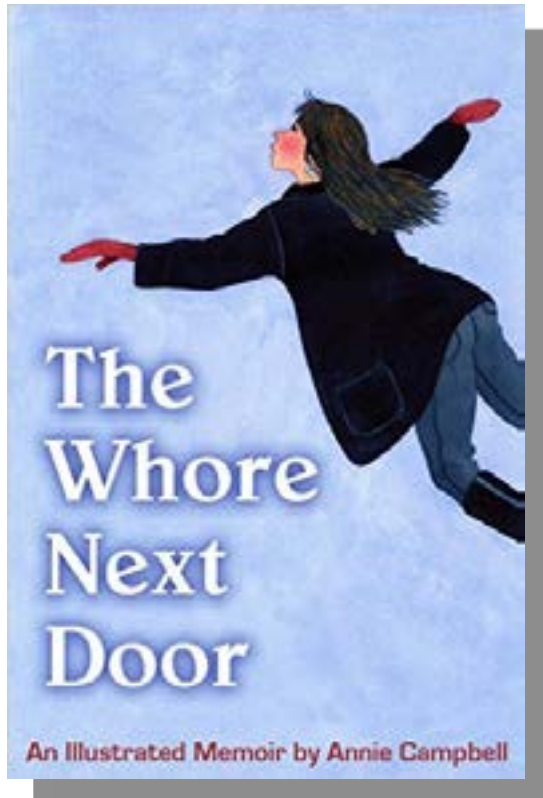
After the frog once again chose the correct card, Bass-man sprang from his chair so fast he knocked it over – and ran from our house laughing and shrieking ghoulishly.

In the cards is an excerpt from
my illustrated memoir

THE WHORE

NEXT DOOR.

It's a shameless attempt to get you
interested in the odd things I write
and paint.



If you are curious, check the link below to see the first 10 illustrated chapters of my book on Amazon. Use the "Look Inside" feature.

I hope it amuses you!

Find The Whore Next Door
on amazon.com

Nice Girl

You want me to be seen
not heard. You fear
the unforeseen: blossoms
might freeze or squirrels
eat the fruit. You are so
reasonable, seeking only
the best: no interest or late
penalties, boring magazines
to quiet your heart. Under
the smile that dares not say
the wrong thing a nasty
shout is rumbling. I won't
sit in the air and suffocate.
The tree is so laden
with pears some will fall
in my lap. I do not say
please take your hands
from my throat. I crack
your elbows like dry brush,
break your wrist as cleanly
as a dead magician's wand.

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'Nice Girl' first appeared in
The Greenfield Review 14, 3/4 (1987)

A DREAM

by Chris MacCormick

I was walking with a friend in a familiar village. The day was handsome, open and warm, and we were just going along.

On a board fence we noticed a poster that looked like a square-dance or boxing handbill—raw letters, some of the lines in boldface—and went over to read it. It said that Jesus had come back and was going to perform three miracles that afternoon at the softball field at the edge of town. It seemed preposterous; but having nothing else to compel our interest, we headed in that direction.

When we arrived, things seemed about ready to get underway. There was enough of a crowd to fill up the infield, all sitting on the grass. On the pitcher's mound stood a bearded man with long hair and a long, soft robe, looking like nothing so much as a picture of Jesus you might have seen in Sunday school. We couldn't see or hear well from where we were watching, across the outfield fence, but I was impressed by a glow of enthusiasm about the crowd. I saw no shows of skepticism, anyway.

The Jesus character spoke a little, and then his performance started. A silver globe not much smaller than a bowling ball appeared on the edge of the crowd, flying in a swift, smooth circle. I couldn't figure it at all. I made what must have appeared quite a stunned look in my friend's direction, then turned back in time to see a white dove fly in from the di-

rection of the woods beyond the backstop. The dove flew alongside the silver ball, twining with it just out in front like a porpoise at the prow of a boat.

I don't remember how that ended. I was taken aback, so much so that I failed to register the next events, only taking the sense of amazing things continuing to transpire. Meanwhile I kept tripping over the idea that what I had just witnessed was something I couldn't even have made up.

Somehow while I remained preoccupied and inward we drew closer, while still remaining apart from the others. The man looked at us directly and asked whether something was troubling us. I got myself roughly in order and answered him.

I said that I was tremendously impressed by what I had just seen. I had been disabused of my expectation of witnessing a cheap fraud, and was glad of it; but I was still bothered. I believed that what he had just shown us had not been in the spirit of Jesus at all. In my understanding, Jesus didn't perform miracles—not the sort of fancy magic that the gullible are bound to find irresistible—but had rather evoked signs of God's will to transform base things into noble ones, dullness or contempt into love, impairment into health. By the time I finished speaking I had regained my sense of the high

ground, and although I continued to show deference toward him, it was the kind that doesn't cost anything, that just sort of projects itself when one's luck is easy.

He smiled, still giving me his steady look. Then the whole scene came to an end in a sort of rush in which all the individual faces of the crowd, none of which I'd especially noticed before, bloomed into distinct focus for a long moment that only faded as I awoke.



Surrounded by



The abundance of harvest season is a heady experience. The fruits of one's labors do literally pile up in buckets, baskets, and drying bunches; the miracle of those gritty little seeds made manifest.

The transition from green to all the other colors only adds to the magic. Different scents come up from misty mornings and dry afternoons. The summer was extremely hot around this region and all of nature seems to be enjoying the shift to cooler days and nights and occasional showers.

Recently while escorting my eighteen month old great nephew, Zeke, on a short hill climb in the park, we came upon a purple-leaved tree. Purple, not just a shade maroon. His Mom and I stood there in awe for a few moments until he wanted to move along. I'm sure we must have walked at least a mile up the hill, then down to the water, and back to the playground for some climbing and sliding, exploring cones and leaves and stones. I try to spend some time with Juwon and Zeke regularly because I know they'll be moving on soon to a new life elsewhere and when I next see this youngster he may be much older....and I will be too. Sharing the magic of nature with him now is important to me. I want him to remember the beauty of this place where he learned to walk.

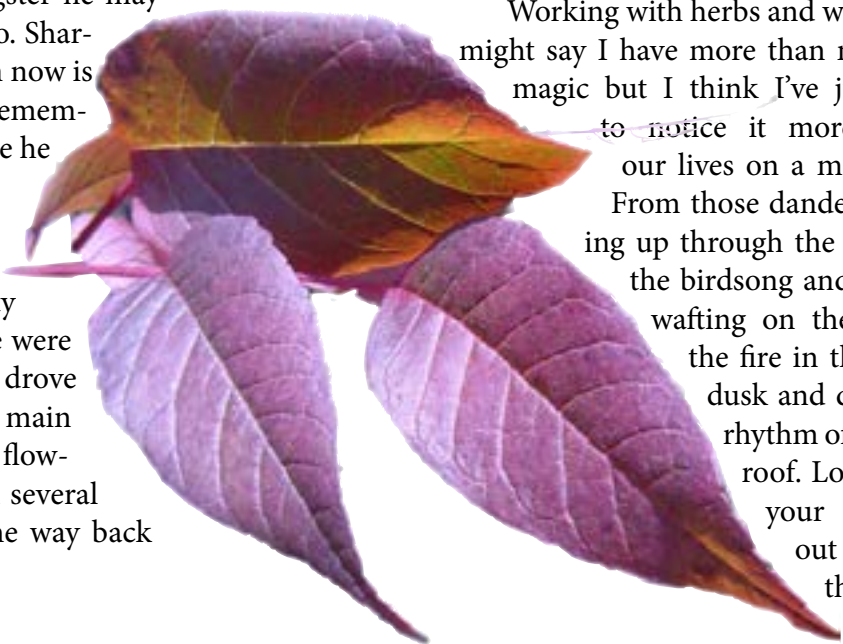
On the way to and from their current home there are summer places that are empty most of the year. Once when we were going somewhere in a group I drove them back the long way to the main road so they could enjoy the flowers blooming their hearts out in several unoccupied yards. Again, on the way back

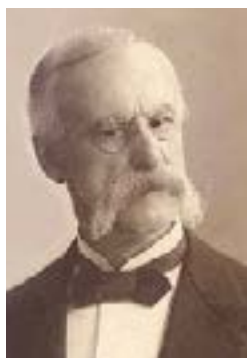
from another outing, I stopped and marveled at an old sprawling stand of lilacs that had mostly dropped their leaves due to drought in which three or four shrubs displayed second flowerings on their very tops....I picked some to take home. It was a scent "out of season" but sweet and dreamy as an evening in June and proof that I wasn't making it up.

The Maximillion Sunflowers are coming on strong, giving the bees a second wind and a last blast of work and food. One night at dusk I discovered the blossoms were full of sleeping Bumblebees, slumbering in twos and threes. I called the woman who had given them to me, to tell her to go and look in her substantial patch. Sure enough she called back to tell me hers were full of sleeping Bumblebees too. This year I will check to see if they build any winter nests in the long hollow stems. I know they had a summer nest in a crevice near the comfrey that has taken over a corner near the deck, perhaps to be closer to the blossoms they love so much. Currently the chipmunks hide under those giant leaves and observe whether the dog is on duty on the porch or not.

Working with herbs and wildlife some might say I have more than my share of magic but I think I've just learned to notice it more. We live our lives on a magic planet. From those dandelions pushing up through the blacktop to the birdsong and tree-sweet wafting on the breeze to the fire in the sky each dusk and dawn to the rhythm of rain on the roof. Look up from your devices, go out and move through it, breathe deeply, or

sit and observe. We are all surrounded by magic.

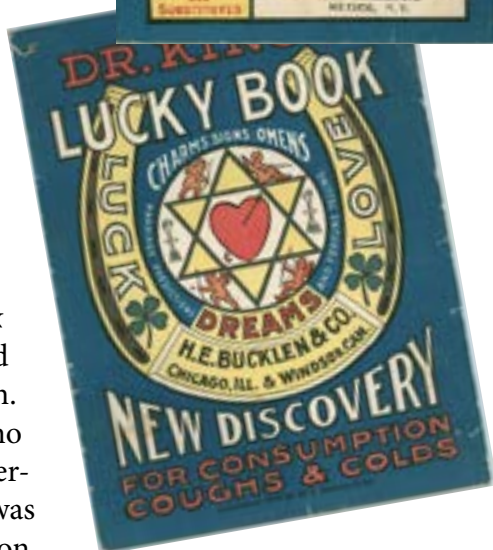




Professor Booknoodle, Phud

1904 was just two years before the United States government passed the Pure Food and Drug Act, which was designed to protect consumers from the likes of Dr. King. H. E. Bucklen & Company manufactured a number of patent medicines, including “Dr. King’s New Discovery for Consumption, Coughs, & Colds”. This concoction claimed to effectively treat consumption. AS we well know there is still no actively effective “cure” for tuberculosis. It was pure quackery. It was predatory. This is a 1904 publication , issued to promote the various dubious products of H. E. Bucklen, who was based in Chicago. Besides “Dr. Kings New Discovery for Consumption”, the pamphlet promoted “Dr. King’s New Life Pills”, “Bucklen’s Arnica Salve”, and “Electric Bitters” (“The great ELECTRIC REMEDY positively cures all diseases of the stomach, Liver and Kidneys, Biliousness, General Debility, Fever and Ague” !!!)

The entire external presentation is a classic of advertising visuals, printed in bright blue, red, white, and and yellow. The front cover proclaims “Charms, Signs, Omens —Marriage Predictions, and Fortune Telling — DREAMS — LUCK — LOVE. Inside a six-pointed star is a big red heart; cupids cavort about the edges. Two four-leaf clovers are printed in green. the whole is encompassed by a lucky horseshoe. On the rear cover Bucklen is comparing (for whatever strange reason) “Dr.



King’s New Discovery” with other new scientific developments : Radium and Marconi Wireless Telegraphy. We’ll assume that the New Discovery did NOT include radium as an ingredient!)

The various texts inside, interspersed among the advertising spiels, are dream interpretations, marriage advice based on omens and astrology, palmistry, astrological and numerological mumbo-jumbo. There is also a lengthy list of brief, pithy proverbs (hardly biblical in nature). The various scattered texts promoting the products are shameless in their confabulations.

Considering how many people are gullible in the world, the whole production is a care-free — and careless — compendium of hucksterism. The inside of the rear cover depicts four lovely young lasses inside the leaves of a four leaf clover, with a caption that reads “THE LUCKY FOUR Charm Away all Sickness cure disease and MAKE YOU HAPPY”.

On the rear cover is printed the name of the drug store that distributed the pamphlet (and likely sold Dr. King’s New Discovery):

“N. D. Hart, Dealer in Drugs and Medicines, Pure Chemicals, Toilet Articles, Perfumery, Fancy Goods, Combs, Brushes, Patent Medicines, etc. — Mexico, N. Y.”

TITLE : Dr. King’s New Discovery Lucky Book (Or, if you wish, “Dr. King’s Lucky Book - new Discovery for Consumption, Coughs & Colds”

AUTHOR : Not given ... Corporate

IMPRINT : H. E. Buckling & Co.

PLACE : Chicago, Illinois & Windsor, Canada

DATE : 1904

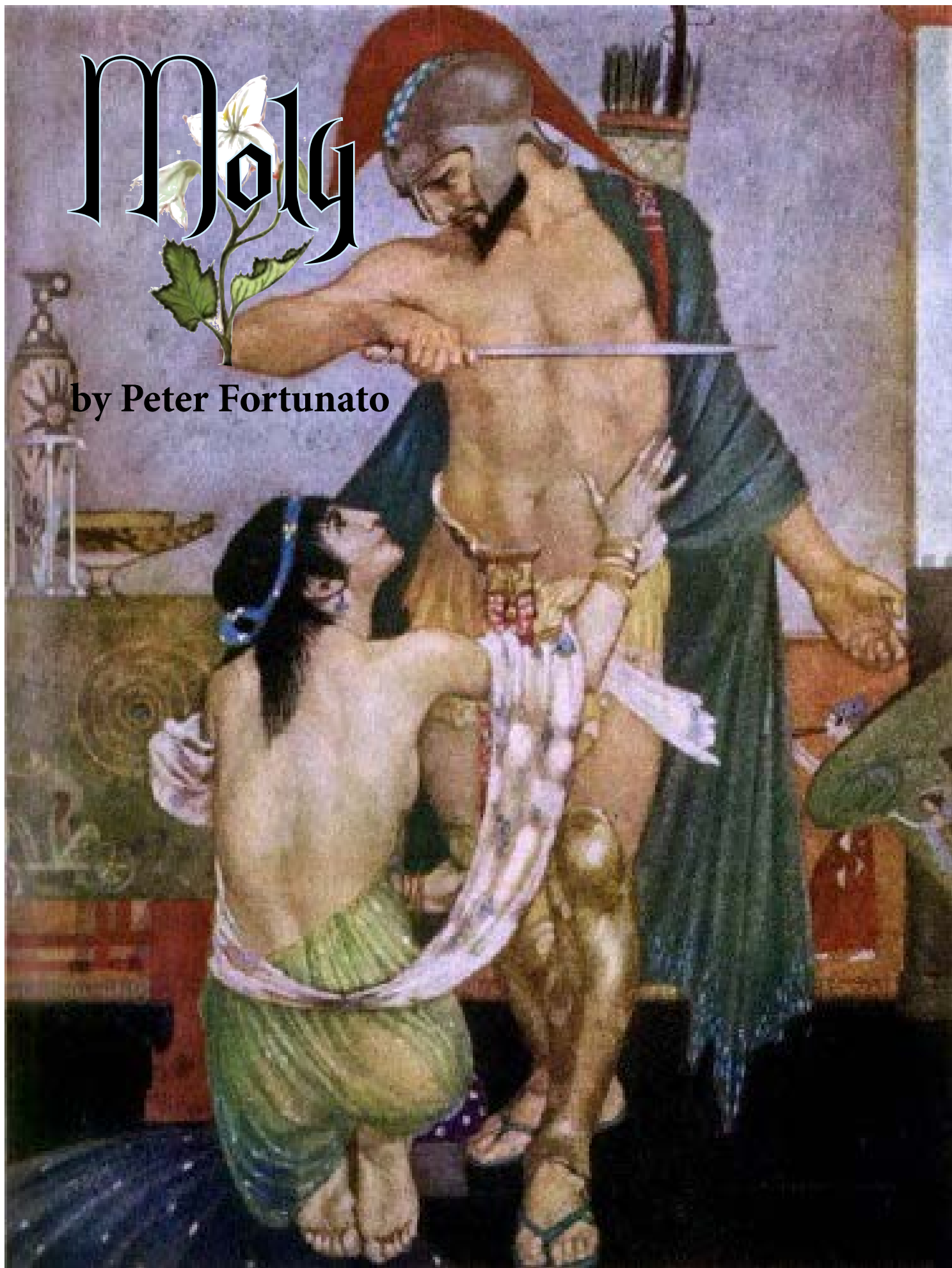
EDITION : Presumed First Edition

It’s a nifty, colorful bit of paper ephemera!

**You can find this book and more on FaceBook at:
Professor Booknoodle, Used & Rare Books**

Moly

by Peter Fortunato





by Peter Fortunato

Peter Fortunato lived in Doha, the capital of Qatar, from 2005 – 2009. There, he taught writing at Weill Cornell Medical College, including a seminar on literature and psychology. The following is an excerpt from a memoir he's writing about his often magical times in the Middle East.

1.

From my journal:

I've been anxious about a brown blotch that appeared on the left side of my nose after a day of too much sun in Oman.

(Oman – ah! Mary and I splurged for three nights at the Al Bustan Palace, a resort paradise of palm trees and pools and volcanic stone outcroppings on a cove of the Arabian Sea. Oman – oh! I hiked away alone into the broiling black hills to meditate, the first time in the Arabian desert I had ever been completely solo, my whereabouts unknown. Oman: like “old Arabia,” a sultanate whose history reaches back hundreds of years to the frankincense trade with India and Africa, to caravan routes old as those the magi traveled on their way to Bethlehem.)

Meanwhile, back in noisy, dusty, Doha-under-construction, I am feeling poorly, and besides my fears about skin cancer, suffering for the past two days with a sinus headache. “Winter” is over, and it's now terribly hot and dry, the relentless sun scorching from the moment it rises. The semester is ending, there's a lot to do at school, but there was this plum after a hard day at work yesterday: an art show opening at the VCU campus next door to us in Education City. The artist was visiting from New York, a Latin American woman, Ms. L, with whom Mary and I hit it off immediately, all of us feeling that if we'd only met back home we could strike up a real friendship. Alas, she is leaving Doha tomorrow, and we'll probably never see each other again. Transient place, liminal place, this desert crossroads where people arrive from all over the world and frequently leave before you can get to know them.

All of the happy socializing at L's opening smoothed over my post-holiday blues, but must every garden have a serpent? I'm trying to keep a sense of sobriety about that splotch on my face: maybe I'll have to join the melanoma club. Okay. If that's the case I'll do it, whether I like it or not. *

Awoke this morning at around 4:00 am from a sequence of dreams that began in the company of the Italian actor Roberto Benigni, one of my favorites. It was as if I had entered his universe, his commedia happening at hyper-speed. I was traveling with him from one dream site to another, and I was reading a book on botany as I went, and I found between the pages the pressed leaves of an actual plant.

Then I was at a public event with people I didn't know, but it was a happy happening, like L's opening the other night. Suddenly, a tall, thin guy, a long-hair who reminded me of a carpenter I worked with in California years ago, a guy from Binghamton, whose tool box I copied to build my own – that guy with the whacked out jokes, that fool who tried to rob a grocery store and got himself arrested – he was there. At the buffet he's munching on something that looks like a celery heart. I ask for a taste. He has a whole clump of them in his hand, but instead of giving me one of those, he gives me a bite of what he's eating. Its texture is vaguely reminiscent of fennel, but it doesn't taste like fennel or anything else I've ever eaten.

In next moment, a woman comes up behind me: I hear her voice and then she literally has her hands all over me. Without turning around, as if we're playing a game, I ask, “Is this L?” She laughs and says, “I'm not L. But you can call me whatever you like.” She continues moving her hands on my body, and it's the way mothers will sometimes play with their young children, asking, “What's this? What's this? What's this?” I'm answering, “My hand. My shoulder. My nose.” She's full of mirth and laughter and she goes: “No hand. No shoulder. No nose.” I'm repeating these words, the words of the Heart Sutra, “no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind – nor what the mind takes hold of” as I awaken.

The Heart Sutra: the essence teaching on the Wisdom Gone Beyond all dualities. Sometimes personified as the goddess Prajnaparamita.

2.

In the middle of my life, not exactly lost in a dark wood as was Dante at the outset of his *Divina Commedia*, nor driven so much to the types of compulsive behavior that typify a midlife crises, but yes, in the middle of my life, alone in a very foreign land, my wife teaching here only for this one semester and just about to leave, I dwell on a manifesto of the poet Ezra Pound, written when he was merely 26, “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris.” In it, Pound sought to identify certain principles of art pertaining to the New and the Modern as understood in the light of the Classical. And in an early book, *The Spirit of Romance*, he was already outlining the ideas with which he would seek to revolutionize modern poetry and collecting “the palette of colors” necessary for his epic poem, *The Cantos*.

I have since I first agreed to come here, chosen to think of my Doha days “in the spirit of romance”; that is, as an adventure -- even though tedium might be the most familiar challenge posed to me in this car-congested, shiny city rising in the desert. I try to reach across the culture barriers that separate the many social classes, and though I identify with the scads of guest workers who are actually building the place, I am more privileged than they, of course. They know the difference: I'm here to teach future doctors, I'm well rewarded, and within limits, quite free.

Being in an utterly foreign culture, I dream often about my youth and about friends far away. I reread Pound, my old teacher, and interestingly I find myself thinking about my Italian born father: uneducated, he spoke almost no English when he jumped ship and arrived in America. He was, however, a magician whose close-up work almost landed him on the Ed Sullivan show. Out of Pound's ocean of ideas, these thoughts leap, flashing before my eyes: "The artist seeks out luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment. His work remains the permanent basis of psychology and metaphysics. . . I am more interested in life than in any part of it."

Far from Ithaca, I strive to stay on track: autobiographical magic I once called my writing, my way to self-knowledge. "The art is transformation," I wrote in a poem dedicated to my father. Dead now dozens of years, he was a conjuror, restaurateur, womanizer – a charmer who, in the middle of his life, abandoned my mother and me. I have so many things I wish I could tell him.

3.

In the Egyptian story, the scattered limbs of murdered Osiris are gathered together and magically reconstituted into a living man by his wife, Isis. A fish had eaten the male member when it was tossed into the Nile by his wicked brother Set, and so Isis must substitute a piece of wood -- a nice touch!

Metaphorically speaking, the absence of the phallus and in its subsequent restoration symbolize the self-renewing power of the Divine. Out of the Void, something new always arises, and in this story it is distinctly due to feminine magic. Thanks to Isis, Osiris becomes a god of resurrection and immortality. Similarly, in Hindu mythology, the relationship between the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine is explicitly represented by the erect penis, or lingam, of Shiva in conjunction with the vulva, or yoni, of Shakti. As Kali, the goddess kills Shiva during their divine copulation, beheading him, before he returns to life.

The yoni alone might be worshipped or the lingam, since each is in itself a symbol for that which is beyond duality. So too, the ancient Greeks and Romans erected stylized effigies of the male member (the herm) to invoke the blessings of the companionable god Hermes. Among the Egyptians, the ithyphallic Min had attributes similar to those of Osiris: fertility and prosperity. His erection issues from a point at the height of his navel, perhaps meant to indicate that he is a son of the goddess as well as her lover. Whatever their forms, whether depicted in ecstatic union or not, these primordial gods and goddesses unify opposites such as male and female, blind lust and discernment, impermanent flesh and immortal spirit. *

"I am more interested in life than in any part of it," Pound says, pointing to one difference between poets and academic specialists. For the poet, the part is perceived in relation to the whole: "the luminous detail," Pound calls it,

because the image, the symbol, the synecdoche speak to the unconscious immediately without having first to answer to the intellect. (This, by the way, is the basis for sympathetic magic.) I might call this "Feminine" thinking, which recognizes that all parts have a role in the totality of an experience and can stand for the whole. "Masculine" thinking might then develop a critical analysis to deepen our understanding of how the parts work to comprise the entirety. Importantly, the further you go with your thinking in either direction, the more necessary is the compensating power of the other in order to maintain a balanced perspective.

The dashing young Ezra Pound with whom I was so impressed when I first read him in college was a self-styled troubadour and aesthete, a translator and editor and publisher, a free-lance literary critic who succeeded in changing the world of letters. He might well have thought of himself as a magician, given his lofty ambition and all of the goals he reached. However, during midlife he seems to have lost his way, at least partly as a result of obsessions beyond the purely artistic. While living in Italy, Pound became a propagandist for the dictator Mussolini and ended up raving against the Jews as well as the Allied powers during World War II. There are many passages of extraordinary beauty throughout *The Cantos*, especially in the early books and the very late ones, but when he begins weaving into his epic his disturbed ruminations on history, governance, banking, and war, a reader is likely to become lost or frustrated or disgusted with him.

Pound himself seems to have fragmented under the strain of composition, like a magician fallen victim to his own overreaching powers. As *The Cantos* – "the songs" -- become increasingly preoccupied with history, political science and usury, their music is choked off; their lights dim and their enchantment fades. This speaks to the want of the quality I associate with the Feminine: an harmonious acceptance of the world as it is, in contradistinction to Masculine dissection and the wish to manipulate things. Bearing in mind the principle of enantiodromia (the compensatory activity that constellates the opposite of a natural phenomenon, as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus saw and the psychologist C. G. Jung later expanded upon) we might speculate that Pound's madness was a result of his excessive efforts "to make sense" out of so many disparate stimuli.

Still, critics like Hugh Kenner have argued that the entire *Cantos* is of inestimable value precisely because it includes the evidence of its creator's psychic disintegration and then his late artistic resurrection: after Pound's years of near silence during his imprisonment in a US mental hospital, he returned to Italy and completed his book. For these reasons, *The Cantos* can be seen as authentic to the circumstances not only of its author-protagonist, but also of his entire culture, which was so terribly fragmented by World War II. A Modern epic, it can be said that it does indeed "make new" the Classical genre -- which is what the poem explicitly sets out to do, commencing with its magnificent, opening allusion to Book 10 of Homer's *Odyssey*. *

*And then went down to the ship,
Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also
Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward
Bore us onward with bellying canvas,
Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.*

When I first heard this music, I was twenty years old, searching for teachers and spiritual fathers, and soon I set sail to follow Pound as he himself had followed masters of poetic craft such as Homer and Dante. "Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess." Yes, exactly: the witch goddess Circe is both Pound's muse and the one whose magic supplies Odysseus and his crew with a ship – a craft -- to continue their journey. As in Homer, when Pound's hero leaves Circe's island, he first visits the underworld to find his bearings: "The ocean flowing backward, came we then to the place/ Aforesaid by Circe." This is a frightening task – but necromancy and mediumship are fundamental to both poetry and magic. Odysseus consults with the shade of the seer Tiresias and receives a dismaying prophecy about the end of his travails. As well, besides the dead heroes of the Trojan War, his comrades, he encounters among the shades his mother who has died since he set off years earlier for Troy. This is one of the most moving episodes of *The Odyssey*; however, Pound's project is not simply to retranslate it, but to go forth from this specific scene, sacred to Western literature.

Book 10 of *The Odyssey* famously includes the story of how Circe transforms Odysseus' crewmates – famished, lustful, ordinary men -- into swine. Their captain, however, is safeguarded against her sorcery because he eats the plant moly from the hands of Hermes. Furthermore, the god counsels him to show Circe his sword when she attempts to ensnare him, and even to threaten her with death if need be; Hermes prophesies that once Circe has acknowledged that Odysseus is the hero who was foretold to her, he will share her divine bed and seal his triumph. He does -- and furthermore Circe grants his request that his men be released from their enchantment. For an entire year they all enjoy the generosity of the goddess before growing homesick and setting out once more for Ithaca in the craft she provides.

But what is moly whose magic is so potent
that once eaten the charms of a goddess
can be resisted? Homer (as translated by
Butcher and Lang) says:

***"It was black at the root,
but the flower was like to milk.***

'Moly,' the gods call it, but it is hard for mortal men to dig, howbeit with the gods all things are possible." On one level moly is an actual plant that some researchers have identified as a type of wild rue, an herb used for medicinal purposes that is also regarded as a prophylactic against evil; others say that moly is a wild garlic, also medicinal, also considered magical in the Mediterranean region. Beyond these botanical speculations it is not possible to say exactly what plant Homer had in mind, but that

isn't necessary in order to grasp moly's significance: it is a gift from the gods that makes possible a correct relationship with them. It maintains harmony. It is holy.

After eating the herb, Odysseus can join brute desire with a sense of proportion. In other words, with moly's help, he can see that Circe is indeed a goddess, very powerful, not evil, albeit dangerous to mortals who don't possess the gift conferred by Hermes. From a psychological perspective, moly is a source of non-rational knowing; it is magical, like Hermes himself, who mediates between spiritual and human realms. This is why Hermes is a god of both magicians and poets, as well as of psychologists, as Jung understood. This recognition also opens a way to think about the meaning of craft as it relates to the making of art or other forms of magic. The correct relationship among parts is their harmony, their sense of proportion and beauty, the "truth" that they strive after.

4.

In Doha I read *The Cantos* in its entirety for the first time: late afternoons in my office at WCMC-Q, with soft music streaming from my computer, the lights low, the hallways quiet, my feet up on my desk -- just as I thought a professor should be free to do. I thought about Pound and his madness, and I thought about my own father, another sort of magician whose illusions also subsumed him.

Near the end of Pound's life, after his mental breakdown, after his years of incarceration, late in his life when he had grown almost completely silent, he would admit that he had mistaken a symptom for a cause, that he had lost his "focus," and that avarice was the underlying problem he ought to have addressed, rather than the usury he identified with the Jews. He never apologized publicly for his anti-Semitic, anti-Ally rants (although Allen Ginsberg tells a moving story of a private conversation with the old man), and for some readers until this day his behavior is unforgivable, his madness no excuse, his ravings precluding all contrary claims to greatness.

I believe that I might go mad myself were I to continue pondering humanity's boundless stupidity, greed and anger. The Buddha taught that rebirth in the world of suffering is inevitable unless these "afflictions" are remedied, and he taught the Eight Fold Noble Path as a means to do so. The ultimate antidote is called Highest Perfect Wisdom, *Prajnaparamita*, which in the West is called *Gnosis*. The Buddha said he had given his students a path to liberation, but that they must walk it themselves. This is a powerful statement coming from the compassionate, awakened One, a human being like us and not a god. However much any of us would wish to compel others to see by our lights, they cannot be made to do so. As for Ezra Pound, he seems at last to have accepted that life is not so symmetrical as a work of art might be, but that rather, life is illuminated according to its own principles, and not the will of the artist.

We are capable of amazing rationalizations for our ob-

sessiveness, as well as many clever defenses against the threats we believe that others pose to us. Throughout his life, my errant father never thought that he had set out to do me or my mother harm. I can accept his reasoning, flawed though it proved: for all his life he saw himself as a survivor, a resourceful wayfarer whose mother had died when he was a child and whose authoritarian father knew him only at a distance among six other sons. I see now how poorly prepared he was for parenting me, and I forgive him.

5.

From my journal:

Mary has gone from Qatar to deliver a paper in England, and then she will return to Ithaca, her term in Doha having expired. I have signed a three year renewal of my contract and grieve her departure and wonder how I will resume my life here next Fall without her.

Have I always been so anxious? I think I have inherited my kindly mother's worried stomach as well as my wily father's volatility.

And then there's "the black spot," as I've been calling this thing on the right side of my nose. I have consulted by telephone with my friend, the lovely Dr. O. She has referred me to a dermatologist at a local private clinic. On the phone with O, I made little of my concerns and soon found myself flirting, as in the old days before Mary first arrived in Doha. Then I was planning with O when we could get together before we each leave for the summer. How quickly I am back in familiar territory! Have I had a sufficient dose of moly?

*

I find the clinic in one of Doha's upscale neighborhoods. I am expected and immediately escorted to an exam room by a demure nurse in white uniform, hijab and shayla. A short while later the doctor arrives and I am stunned by her appearance. She must be in her thirties, white-coated, her head uncovered, dark ringlets pulled back neatly by tortoise shell combs. I deduce she might be of Persian heritage, like Dr. O. (Or maybe Lebanese? Palestinian? I never asked.) Dr. Z introduces herself with an American accent and a courteous handshake. (How strange to be touched by an unknown woman, even under professional circumstances, in Qatar!) She is obviously happy to meet and chat with an American, and we converse amiably and openly about her education at Johns Hopkins, her former life in the U.S.A., her unhappy days in Doha. Her husband, an oncologist, has returned to States and she doesn't know what their future together holds. Doha has worn her out, because, as for me and so many expats, life in Qatar can seem to be mostly about work.

Suddenly, I'm finding it difficult to continue our conversation, or even to look at her directly: her eyes are the bewitching eyes of the eastern Mediterranean that invariably ignite my heart with fantasy.

Is it unseemly for a married man of my age to believe in the limitless possibilities of love? I thrill to what the great poets tell us about the immortal gods and goddesses – those powers whom William Blake asserts "reside within the human breast." And so, Dr. Freud, why should my fantasies be dismissed as "psychological compensations" for the limitations of my mortality? And, by the way, Dr. Jung, I know very well that my "imaginal" conceits are not my unique prerogative but are archetypal -- this doesn't mean they aren't as much mine as my flesh and blood pumping heart. With Walt Whitman, I celebrate my contradictions. My lust is a light in me, a shadow, too, and because of this, it gives depth to my experience.

At last our flirtation must cease and I become a patient for Dr. Z. to examine. She takes a step back. I tell her about my recent sojourn in Oman. With her bag of instruments at the ready, she asks me to be seated on the edge of her examination table. Then she picks up a magnifying lens to study the dark, dime-sized spot on the side of my nose. Dangling my legs from the edge of the high table where I sit, I stare ahead at our reflections in her office window. I am in a blue dress shirt, a blue and gold tie, pressed tan slacks and black shoes, my outfit de rigueur at conservative Weill Cornell. My graying hair is long, however, and I take special care in trimming my mustache and goatee. I am rather like my father in this respect: rather vain.

"This looks like burnt skin," Dr. Z announces almost immediately. "Weird, though, that it's just one spot. And perfectly round." She pauses for a moment. "In the sun, all those hours, were you wearing eyeglasses to read?"

I think about that last afternoon on the grounds of the Al Bustan Palace, my reading lenses perched low on my nose. I remember the waters of the Arabian Sea lapping at the my feet and the bikini clad beauties lounging all about me. "I didn't want it to end, and I lingered for hours with my book."

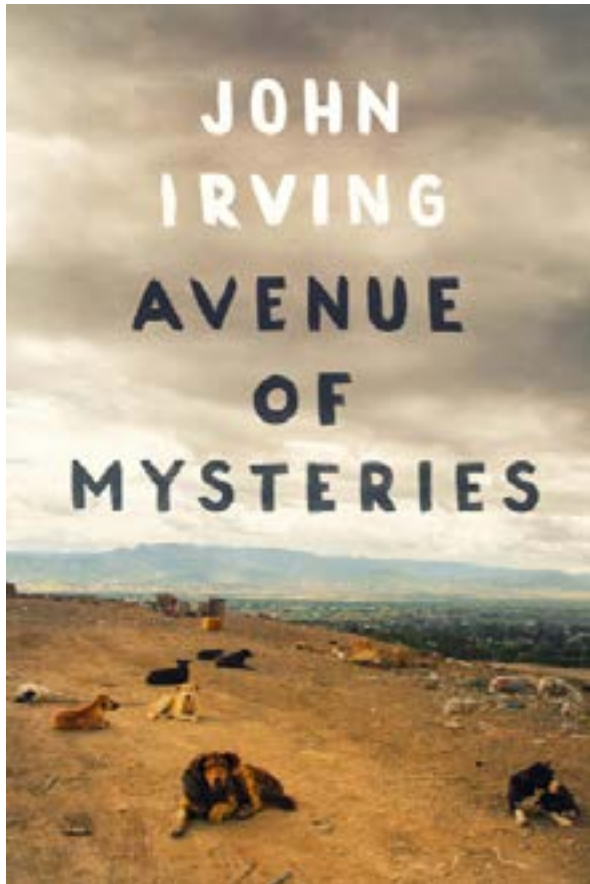
She smiles at me, her warmth from a distance now. "Keep it moist with Vaseline or first aid cream, and it will probably peel off shortly. Keep your new skin protected."



Peter Fortunato, MFA, CHT, is a poet and painter, as well as a hypnotist in private practice in Ithaca. His web site is www.peterfortunato.wordpress.com

Avenue of Mysteries

by John Irving



In *Avenue of Mysteries*, Juan Diego—a fourteen-year-old boy, who was born and grew up in Mexico—has a thirteen-year-old sister. Her name is Lupe, and she thinks she sees what's coming—specifically, her own future and her brother's. Lupe is a mind reader; she doesn't know what everyone is thinking, but she knows what most people are thinking. Regarding what has happened, as opposed to what will, Lupe is usually right about the past; without your telling her, she knows all the worst things that have happened to you.

Lupe doesn't know the future as accurately. But consider what a terrible burden it is, if you believe you know the future—especially your own future, or, even worse, the future of someone you love. What might a thirteen-year-old girl be driven to do, if she thought she could change the future?

As an older man, Juan Diego will take a trip to the Philippines, but what travels with him are his dreams and memories; he is most alive in his childhood and early adolescence in Mexico. As we grow older—most of all, in what we remember and what we dream—we live in the past. Sometimes, we live more vividly in the past than in the present.

Avenue of Mysteries is the story of what happens to Juan Diego in the Philippines, where what happened to him in the past—in Mexico—collides with his future. -

John Irving returns to the themes that established him as one of our most admired and beloved authors in this absorbing novel of fate and memory.



SIMON & SCHUSTER

Simon & Schuster 480 pages ISBN 9781451664164 | November 2015

- See more at: <http://books.simonandschuster.com/Avenue-of-Mysteries/John-Irving/9781451664164#sthash.X05JoKRm.dpuf>



Tricks are for kids

by Franklin Crawford

My father was magical from the time I could walk and talk until I could almost print my name. He stopped being magical when he showed me, Doc and Johnny, the Jack n' Jill game. The performance had stumped me up to that day of disillusionment.

On the steps outside his shop Dad wetted two small pieces of tissue paper with his tongue and placed them delicately on the fingernails of his left and right index fingers. Dad's index and middle fingers were close to even lengthwise. I don't know if this served him well as a carpenter, but the were a plus for the Jack n' Jill stunt.

"This is an old little story from long long ago and no one knows how it came to be ..." Dad said, placing his hands palms down with only the papered fingernails showing. He was scary-big but spoke in a disarming singsong voice:

**"It's a story about a couple of birds
that can fly so high they disappear in
the big blue sky. Behind your ears—is
that where they go? Maybe aback of
your head where you have no eyes?
No one knows. No one knows where
they go when they go
they just fly away fly."**

We stared at the hands and the show began:

"Two little blackbirds

Sitting on a hill,

One named Jack – "

Dad held up his right papered finger –

Jack – and, likewise, the other–

"One named Jill."

I'd seen him do this a half dozen times. He had to be in the right mood. The birds were pieces of white paper but I saw them as crows sitting on a hill above a cornfield.

Without warning Dad said “Fly away Jack!” He jerked the right hand over his shoulder so fast we flinched. Just as quick the hand came back to its place – no paper on the finger! No Jack! Before we knew, he called, “Come back, Jack!”

Again the hand flitted backward and returned to place. There was Jack.

Johnny, the youngest, leaped up and looked behind Dad’s ear – just what I did the first few times. I doubted the magic but I hadn’t quite solved the trick. I didn’t really want to know. I was, in fact, afraid to learn how the game worked: Once you mess with the magic you can’t go back.

Dad repeated the same routine for Jill. When Jill flew away and the bare finger returned, Johnny inspected Dad’s hair looking for her.

“Where she go?” Johnny asked.

“Ain’t gone no place, John Lee,” Doc said calmly. He had not flinched when Dad sent Jill over his shoulder. Johnny was still looking for Jill when Doc focused on Dad’s hand, pointed and said: “You change fingers.” I was stunned. Doc was older and supposed to be smarter but he wasn’t that much older.

“What do you mean?” Dad asked, no longer the trickster. More like a teacher coaxing an explanation from a bright student.

Doc mimed the routine showing how the index and middle fingers were swapped each time.

Dad fished a quarter out of his pocket and gave it to Doc. Twenty-five cents was two whole candy bars in those days.

“I knew it, too,” I said.

“No you didn’t, son,” Dad said. “Doc figured it.”

I got red-faced mad. For years (okay, I hadn’t logged many hours on the planet) I’d been fooled by that trick. The last couple times I more or less let myself be fooled. It was magic and it made Dad a wondrous and mysterious Oz-Man. But Doc was not playing the game. Doc and John Lee were dirt poor sons of an Alabama sharecropper. They didn’t go in for kid games. Doc got it the first time and called it the way he saw it. Only adults did that—at least to my four-year-old’s understanding.

Fly away Jack! Fly away Jill!

Fast-forward: I got shoved through the veil of make-believe and the always threatening questions in my brain became incessant. Everything I loved about life, sounds colors tastes smells—was it all tomfoolery? My

brother said the sky wasn’t blue, we just thought it was blue. If you squeezed your nose you could bite into an onion and not taste it. A radio song said there were answers in the wind. Lies! The wind knocked baby birds out of trees and the cats ate them and the cats got shoved into dirt holes when they stopped moving. What kind of happy hunting ground was that?

I didn’t want to be a skeptic—I wanted magic. When sex and drugs finally arrived I thought I’d hit the jackpot. That quest took me loop d’loop through the butt cheeks of hell.

Jack fell down and broke his crown; Jill came tumbling after.

What was their crime? They went to fetch a pail of water. Fucking water! Shit happens. It ain’t right. A guy like me needs a little more ... something.

Like ... A draft of supernatural Kool-Aid would hit the spot right about now. Sure: Magical thinking is brain rot that dissembles to quasi-mystical clap-trap and post-New Age hooey. Does that rule-out Wonder or even a love of Fate when I’m not scared to death of dying? Science is cool but the more I learn the less I want to know.

Question: Why is the universe expanding?

Answer: To get the hell away from us!

I’ve worked hard and paid dearly for magic potions and spells ever since I was breast-fed and bottle-weaned. The expiration date has long passed on altered states that demand painful re-entry fees. I hate impermanence! Then again all stories revolve around change. That’s the problem isn’t it? Spinning spheres, repetitive, circular, seasonal life. Magic is the thing that stops the merry-go-round, lifts the brain out of its darkened vault and for an infinite moment of stop-time suspends all motion. Then we see! Then ... we don’t.

Sigh.

Dad rewarded Doc for not being fooled. It was a good lesson. But I will always yearn for that lost time that ended when Papa called those two paper birds home from a hill in my virginal imagination.

“Come back Jack! Come back, Jill!”

Franklin Crawford is a long time journalist,
and Editor of *TintyTownTimes.com*.



Messages From The Other Side: **One Last Glorious Gift From Shirley**

by Corbie Mitleid

My beloved stepmother, Shirley, died on a cold February day in 2009. She was alone in the house where she'd lived with my father for decades, and which he had left to her seven years before. It was fast, said the police who found her, and the coroner some days later. A massive heart attack, perhaps a stroke; she went down and was gone within a minute or so.

Because Shirley was a landscape designer by trade and delight, and had lavished endless amounts of love and care on the family's "little woods" behind the house, everyone agreed that we should wait until it was in full bloom to commemorate her life. And so we cremated her in February, but celebrated her in June.

The clouds and rain held off until long after the service, which wasn't, technically, a service at all. About forty or so of her relations and friends gathered on the back patio that my father had built oh, so many

years ago. And one by one, we told Shirley stories.

Shirley came to me in her fifties, and died at 80. So I never knew her younger self: more vibrant, incredibly gorgeous, with a brilliant smile and a heart-stopping face, gracious and elegant. I heard about her deep love of nature and trees, her curiosity about everything, her laughing jags (so like mine!), and everything she gave her children Kappy, John and Sam, that live on in their lives and passions.

I told a story, too, that only I could tell. Shirley was the member of the family who completely, unconditionally accepted my otherworldly nature. She believed in my work, and encouraged me to shine, even if the rest of the family didn't quite understand what I did, or why I did it. So every couple of years, I'd receive one of Shirley's breathless calls, telling me of finding a purple cellophane star in the middle of her living room floor. One like the bright and silly stars that looped through the house when Dad was alive, but had been cleared and thrown out at his death.

"This morning," she'd say, in her breathy, half-whispering voice, "I found a STAR. Do you think — it could be your father?"

And I'd always laugh, and say "Shirley, of course it is! Why would you ever doubt it?" I knew how much

my father had adored her — and if he could send her a star from Heaven, he would. And, I'm sure, did.

And there'd be a satisfied sigh. "I THOUGHT so."

Shirley never told anyone about our secret phone calls. I figured she wouldn't mind if I shared it at the memorial.

But someone topped my story. . .

There was a little man that I'd never seen before at the back of the crowd, who clearly seemed nervous but anxious to share something. At the very end, he walked to the front of the chairs of people, to the little 'speaking area,' and cleared his throat.

"Ah. . . I don't know any of you. But I'm Lou, and I live in back of Shirley Dorkin.

"Someone told me today that this was her funeral, and that she had died in February. I was stunned. I mean, I hadn't seen a lot of her and I knew she hadn't been feeling well... but...

"I saw Shirley in her garden, and it was four or five weeks ago. It was about 10:30 at night, and I saw Shirley walking around in her back yard, in her bathrobe. So I went down and asked if everything was all right. She turned to me but she didn't say anything. I asked if I could do anything for

her, and she still didn't say anything. So then I said if she needed anything, that she should call us. And I turned around and went back into the house and I didn't think anything of it. And now you tell me she's been dead since February. But I know what I saw."

Everyone at the memorial was stunned. Kappy, her daughter, and I were elated. And when the memorial broke up right after that, she and I flew to Lou before he escaped into his own yard.

Yes, he was sure he saw her. Maybe six feet away. "And how did she look?" asked Kappy. "Was she —"

"She looked content," said Lou.

And so Shirley Ruth Holmes Wells Dorkin left us with a magnificent gift. She showed us that we do, indeed, go on. She blew open a door that I'd still been keeping shut around my family — how often Dad steps in to help me with my own medical readings for clients; the conversation I'd had with Shirley and Dad through a Lily Dale medium that was too precise in words and emotion and private family jokes to be anyone but really them.

That was Shirley. Loving, gracious and giving, right to the very end. And apparently, beyond.

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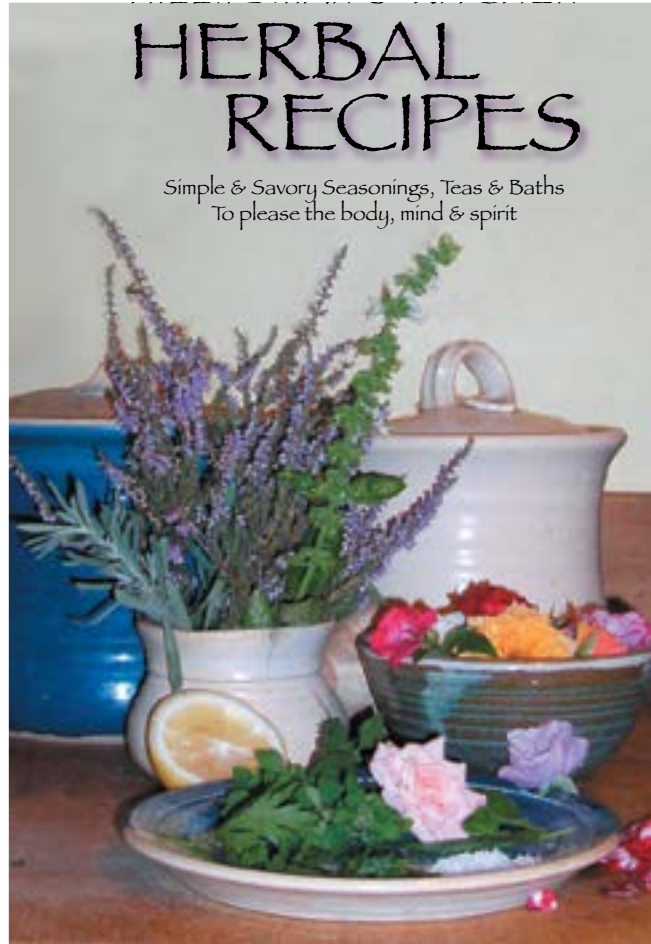
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Varieties of Magic

By David Rollow



Mandala from *Red Book* by Carl Jung

Varieties of Magic

By David Rollow

Humans—*homo saps*, us—appear to have always had a desire to get control over their environment, which threatened their survival. The first group to have any brains got the hell out of Africa (we are coming to understand) in a single migration, in response to some crisis bigger than the Irish potato famine, more than 100,000 years ago. All of us on the planet today, even Australian aborigines, descend from that original flight. Other research has suggested that the group that first entered Europe consisted of only about twenty families, so you can see in both cases how tall the odds against survival were for these mutants, yet they survived and here we are.

This story is usually told, with drumrolls, as the triumph of technology, with technology in the role of the triumph of science. As a devotee of the Whole Earth Catalogue I harbor no objections to technology, which gave us things as useful as the shovel, and not only my iPhone. (The subject of this essay is magic, and the iPhone will come back later.) But from the Whole Earth Catalog I learned that magic is among our necessary technologies.

For when science fails to give us control over some aspect of our lives, we have always turned to magic. Scientists other than Freeman Dyson usually insist that this is folly, but that has never stopped anyone, and the survival of magic in any form suggests that it isn't really useless.

Magic is real. Jung's idea of synchronicity is a modern sophisticate's way of slipping the harness of causality in the service of magic's continued existence, but magic doesn't need C. G. Jung.

YouTube has made it possible to follow the developing careers of great bluesmen, and in regard to magic, Junior Wells is an interesting case. His great song, "Someone Done Hoodooed the Hoodoo



Junior Wells

Man" puts into perspective what love is all about from the standpoint of the blues. It's magic. Screamin' Jake Hawkins meant it when he sang "I put a spell on you—because you're mine!" Muddy Waters meant it when he said his mojo was working, and so do I. Blues songs are often magic spells. The great collection of floating verses that make up the blues and other American folksongs is a catalogue of potent magic, as Bob Dylan realized, presciently, when he was about 19 and first began his larcenous career as a singer-songwriter.

*Don't the moon look pretty mama
Shining across the sea.
Don't the moon look pretty
Shining across the sea.
Don't my gal look fine
When she's coming after me.*

This kind of thing, he was quick to realize, is strong stuff—and it was there for the taking at the time. Junior Wells early in his career wrote dangerous stuff.

*When a girl reach the age of sixteen,
She begin to think she's grown.
That's the kind of woman
You better leave alone.*

That's an example, of course, of the blues as The Truth, but when you know life's truths you need protection, if only from yourself.

*You oughta see my pillow
Where she used to lay.*

You need a mojo hand, a monkey paw, a John the Conqueroo. (A powder made from the St. John's-Wort plant, which is rubbed on the feet to provide magical protection against evil spirits on your journeys in spirit land, meaning night, back doors, women's kitchens, full moons, all that sketchy stuff.)

I don't doubt that Junior Wells wore some kind of bag of protective strong medicines around his neck, hidden under his shirt, but what you see when you watch the YouTubes is that he started out as a small, innocent-looking, vulnerable young man who had a powerful voice and who, as he grew successful, began to dress more and more like a pimp as a way of protecting himself.

That is one thing magic does. I lived for several years in a neighborhood where many people were from the Caribbean and Central America, and there a cigar by the curb was as likely to form some kind of construction to fend off the Baron Samedi as to be someone's burned-up, discarded stogie. Smoke is good for magic. It casts a veil between everyday life and the other world that operates by magical rules. I used to see, besides the cigar-votives left for the Baron, *Santeria* candles left in the park around Jamaica Pond, glass tumblers full of wax that had pictures of saints printed on them. The candles were for sale in the local supermarket, the Hi-Lo. Now I wish I'd bought some as "art," but at the time they were a little too scary for that, because people left them beside the pond with bits of dead animals—chickens, usually—and you *have* to take animal sacrifice seriously. (Greek mythology and the bible are full of these animal sacrifices. In the Hebrew

Bible we have Abraham ready to sacrifice his son. In the *Argonautica*, an animal sacrifice on safe landfall is a prelude to a terrifying sight: the Argonauts fall to their knees as Apollo walks by, indifferent to their presence, and on across the surface of the water, indifferent as well to that.)



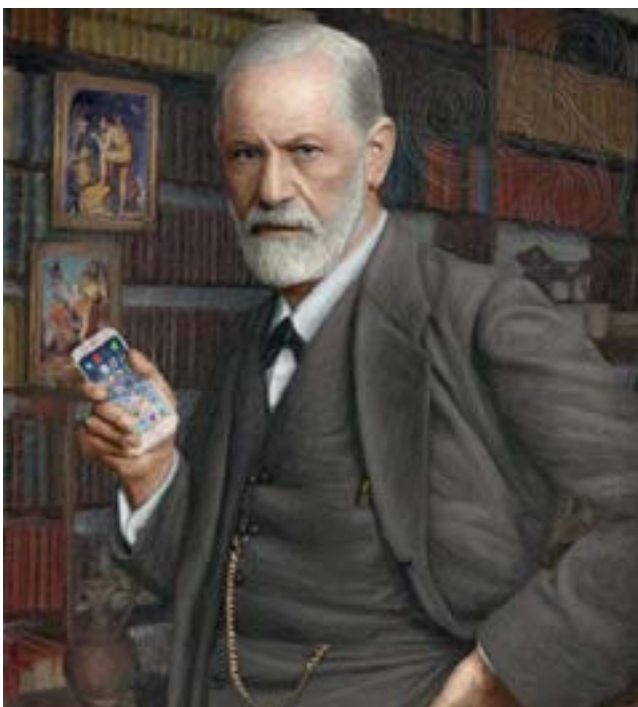
I have the evil eye, according to a Greek who used to be my neighbor. He spit every time he saw me, to ward it off. Another Greek friend taught me a Greek phrase to scare him with, which I once had the opportunity to use; afterward he always crossed the street when he saw me coming. That was effective magic. I've unfortunately forgotten the words. As to my evil eye—it makes people stumble as they are walking toward me, particularly young women. It is a malevolent trait I wish I didn't have.

The reason we've always needed magic, and still do, is that the world is sometimes a terrifying place unreachable by science. Magic, which is all about "power" in the sense that the John the Conqueror Root contains a power in its powder, is for use when causal efficacy is denied us. Our ordinary tools work just fine in the world of causation, or science, where the laws of nature gradually unfolded themselves until Galileo was able to write that the book of nature

was written in the language of number, which meant that it was no longer the Word of God. But nature did not come wholly under our control, and it's still a whole lot bigger than we are. We need to ward off things we can't understand enough to gain causal power over them, like the weather.

Think again of those first and (apparently) only migrants from Africa. Something had grown them a cortex and, walking upright with hands freed for tool use, with the added feature of an opposable thumb, hominids spread all over the globe. They sound like a wild genetic experiment to me. But their numbers were small and the forces arrayed against them were gigantic. The toolmaker could achieve a lot with handaxes and bows and arrows but for fending off the spirits magical powers were all they had.

Among the great modern magicians was Sigmund Freud, who posed as a man of science, a "godless Jew" engaged in explaining the hidden reaches and powers of the mind. Anyone who has ever been cured of depression knows that psychoanalysis is magic, and Freud's mythography of the mind is a map of the spirit realm if ever there was one. Its powers have abstract names: repression, reaction, displacement, condensation, distortions of all kinds. They are magic powers all the same. Symptoms of mental disorder are formed magically: a traumatic experience in



childhood leads to what he called "conversion" and the painful event is transformed by magic into something manageable, such as a compulsion to wipe down every horizontal surface.

Many, if not all, of our drugs are magic. Alcoholic beverages above all, which accompanied the migrating humans everywhere they went, but also distillations of mushrooms, the aforementioned powders and potions, and other commonly self-prescribed drugs. Nepenthe, the drug that Helen of Troy administered to the weary Greeks after they had burned Troy down. Nepenthe was an opiate, they say. A *real* power, not magic. But the effects are magical.

These have the power to bring us into contact with the other dimension where magic rules. What we find there is not always power and seldom control, but the practice of magic can be of use to the imagination as it develops in us from childhood, when we can see fairy castles in the rotting trunks of trees, to adulthood, when it becomes domesticated in the kitchen. Who would deny that cooking is magic? Chefs are magicians of food. Cooking things so they taste good is as magical as anything can be.

But what magic mainly does is provide protection against powers so great that we have no other power over them. Clothes protect us, not only from the hostile elements abroad on our uncomfortable planet, but from each other. I have lived so long in Boston that I own three blue blazers. The one magic implement I learned of in childhood that I'd still like to own is a cloak of invisibility. My clothes perform the same service for me that Junior's pimp gear performed for him.

My iPhone is a magical implement in my pocket.

The question on every eager reader's mind is probably "Does magic work?" because the message of enlightened modern science is "Of course not!" But as we saw, Freud cloaked himself as a scientist and performed efficacious magic using a kind of quasi-hypnosis that enabled his patients to dredge up in



incantatory language the imagery of the unconscious portions of the mind, magic spells.

That was, in some way, the same kind of incantory language as runs through poetry in English, one voice, as if one poem:

*Goe and and catch a falling star
Get with child a mandrake root*

Did not the same poet, two hundred years later, write

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Down to a sunless sea.*

You don't think language is magical? It can save your life, it can change other people's. Robert Frost, in one of his most famous poems, *Mending Wall*, tells a story of magic at work, first outside the poem, then within it. Each spring he and his nearest neighbor walk out to repair the stone wall that defines the boundary of their property, separating them and, evidently, protecting them from each other. Damage to the wall over winter is first described as due to mundane causes. Hunters have breached the wall in places so they can get around freely to kill their game. Hunters have never been respecters of boundaries. However, Frost and his neighbor find other gaps in the wall where stones have fallen for no apparent reason. Some of

the rocks are round and stay in place only if they turn their backs and say a magic spell. This takes the poem around a turn. Perhaps they were moved by elves, Frost mischievously suggests. His neighbor is spade minded and will have none of it. "Good fences make good neighbors," he says, a saying he learned from his father. Frost is put out and makes a mild attempt to mess with his neighbor's head. Perhaps they don't need the fence; the pines on his neighbor's farm, and the apples on his, are different enough that there is no way to encroach on one another's territory. But then he sees his neighbor coming toward him from the shadows of his pine forest, carrying a big rock that he holds with both hands from the top, as if readying to use it to crush his skull. This is the gap that opens within the poem.

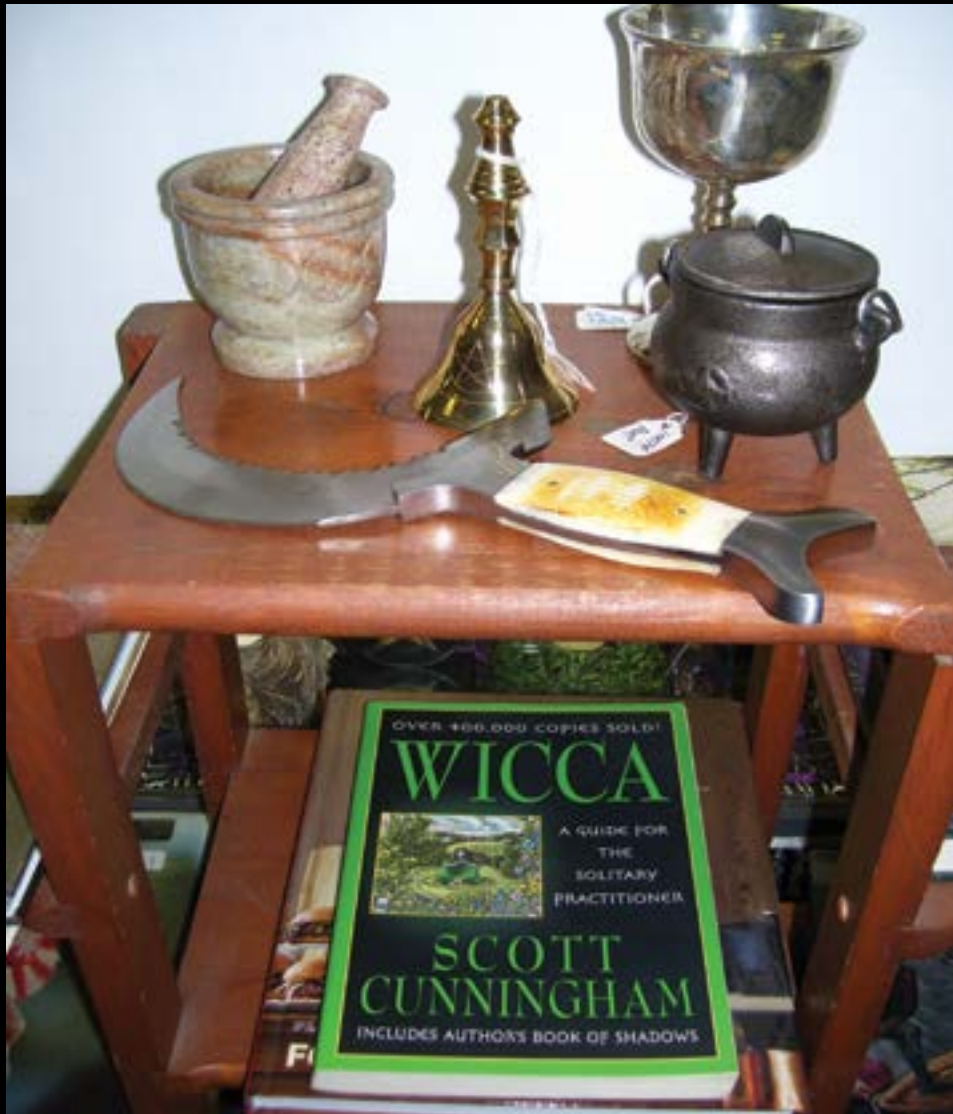
*He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make
good neighbors."*

This, too, is a spell.

David Rollow, the author of *"I Ching and Other Randomizers,"* coauthored paper written with Montgomery Link of the Suffolk University Department of philosophy, on relations in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, has been accepted by the International Wittgenstein Symposium.

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Natural Bone

by David S. Warren

excerpted from Chapter 7 *The Hollow Trout In the Natural Bone Hotel*
and Chapter 8 (in total) *Professor Peckerstone's Red Char*

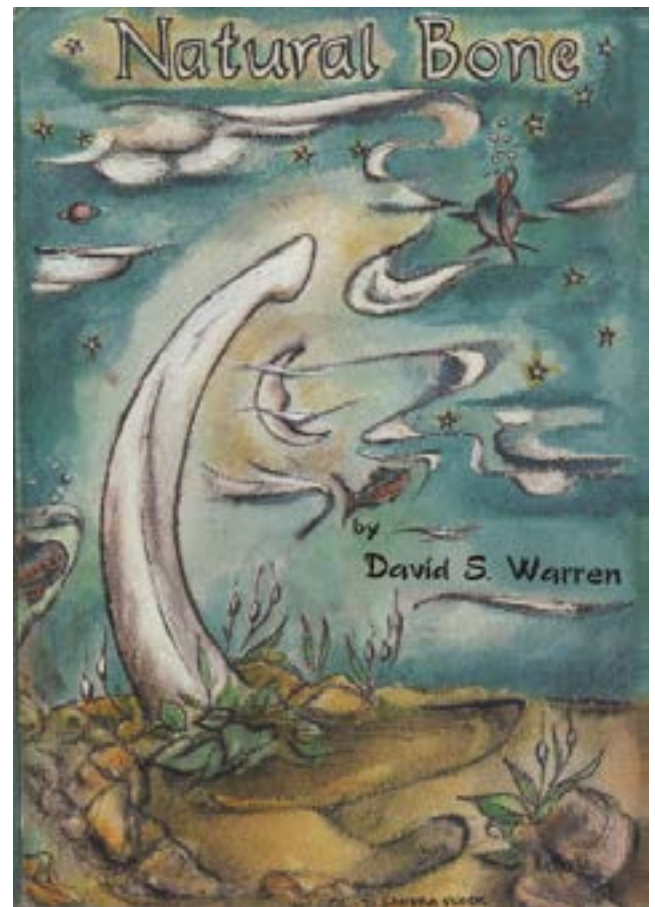
Where We Are Now: Natural Bone

Remarkably, no one but its original founder Noah Davey really knew how the village of Natural Bone got its name, and Noah Davey was so old that he should have long since been dead, but still had his store there, although not one of the village residents patronized it and Noah Davy was not a generous source of information. Davy's store was near the spot where the acid red Oswegatchie River flowed off the granite and ate through the limestone for a ways through a maze of caverns, the main chanel of which popped up in a spring hole not far from the store. The initial section of the caverns could be traveled by a poled boat, and in the past Davy had hired boys to conduct tours for a few people at a time. But no more.

The going businesses of Natural Bone were the talc mine, The Long Horn Saloon, McKewen's Barber Shop / Luncheonette, and three Mink Ranches.

Augustus Reader owned the first of the Mink ranches. He was a World War I vet who lost both legs in France and never talked about it. He had a wife who died, and he never talked about her either, or even said her name.

That left him with his daughter Cynthia who stayed home to help, and a son Kurt, who had gone to Korea and managed to return with all his body parts, but with a mind like a jig-saw puzzle dumped in a box. Kurt helped on the Mink Ranch, but without much enthusiasm, and he would wander off into town most every day. He liked to sit in the Long Horn Saloon at the Natural Bone Hotel, drinking the watered beer they gave him, and listening to conversation or talking to



himself if there was nobody to listen in on.

Strangers from out of town seldom entered the Long Horn Saloon, to say nothing about Noah Davey's vestigial store. But one day the Bus stopped in front of the McKewns Barbershop/Luncheonette, Outside of which Homer McKewen was asleep in a chair, beside his Saint Bernanrd Benjamin the third who was also asleep, curled up into a large mound unrecogizable as a dog.

Out of the bus a grey woman struggled alone with a small, belted suitcase and a lidded knitting basket in which Homer would not have been able to see the very small dog shivering there; but Homer and Benjamin the third did not wake up when the bus stopped anyway.

excerpt from chapter 7

The Hollow Trout In the Natural Bone Hotel

“You can come out, Minnie,” said Clara to the wicker basket. She put the basket down and opened it. The dog trotted directly under Homer’s chair and peed, scratched and trotted back to Clara.

“Oh God!” cried Clara upon finally seeing the St. Bernard, and she snatched Minnie up.

Quickly, Mrs. Mary McKewen Weir smoothed her blue apron down over her big white dress. She touched the netted bun of her chestnut hair, opened the screen door a crack, and spoke in a very low voice, heard by neither Homer nor Benjamin the Third, “Come on in, dear!

Mary gave her a glass of water and then an ice cream cone. Then she gave Minnie a bowl of water and a tiny dish of ice cream. She made Clara a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich and Clara told her that she and Minnie were looking for a home.

They drank coffee and exchanged life stories. Mary told how she and Homer had come to Natural Bone after Homer (a shoe clerk at the time, studying at barber school nights) had presented her (a pastry cook, come to him for support shoes) with Benjamin the First and a proposal of marriage. They had found Natural Bone on their honeymoon and thought it an ideal place for Benjamin to live and grow, for Homer to start his own barber shop, and for Mary to have her dream luncheonette. So even though Benjamin the First had long ago wandered from his square of cement, swallowed a snake and died in the middle of the street, here they were.

In turn, Clara told Mary how she had left her father and three brothers in Philadelphia five years after her mother had left them. Clara told how she had made a living ever since as a railroad extra gang cook, crossing the country several times in this work, going as far as Alaska, never seeing her mother or family, always looking for a home.

Well, Mary told Clara that she had found it, that she knew just the place for her – the Reader Ranch. So then, without even waking Homer and Benjamin the Third, Clara went off with Minnie and their suitcase, down to the Reader Ranch.

As soon as Clara had left, Mary sat down and wrote out her entire week’s column for the *French Lake Weekly Message*, then took it outside, she removed the newspaper from Homer’s head and read to him:

“Today Natural Bone gained a citizen. She is Miss Clara Bovrul who, having retired after an exciting career as a wilderness cook, where she was the only woman, had lived for several years in Alaska and California, and has now come to Natural Bone, looking for a home not too near the mountains and not too near the sea, where she can take her part in a family.

“When asked her impression of Natural Bone after having been here only fifteen minutes, Miss Bovrul replied that she thought it was not a very pretty nor a very sensible name, and that it might better be called ‘Middleville’ instead, because it seems like it is in the middle of something.

Miss Borul will be keeping house and cooking at the Reader Ranch just outside of town.”

Mary Weir had been trying to get the name of Natural Bone changed ever since she had moved there, because neither she nor anyone she knew of could give any reason why it might be called by that name. Now, perhaps, she had some outspoken assistance in the cause. However, Mary didn’t send Clara to the Reader Ranch just because she or anyone else needed her there, but also because of the disarming resemblance she bore to the dead Mrs. Reader – a resemblance no one would ever mention to Clara.



Cynthia, out in the mink yard, saw Clara come carrying her suitcase and talking to the wicker basket, and she recognized the approaching shade of her own dead mother. For a moment, and many moments afterward, it seemed that Mrs. Reader had never died, but only gone away and then come back after many years, aged only inwardly. Clara had the same habit of placing the back of hand to her forehead and sighing, and she had eyes which glared as much as they melted. So struck by this resemblance that she scarcely heard Clara say she was looking for a home in which to work, Cynthia led her right inside to Augustus who was trying to repair a radio which he had disemboweled on the kitchen table. Equally affected by this strange resemblance and the cold glare with which Clara first took him in, he encircled his radio tubes with his arm and drew them together.

“I’m looking for work and a home for my Minnie and me,” Clara said.

“All right,” was all Augustus said.

He scraped his radio parts off the table into the

radio cabinet, took it into the parlor room (which, since shortly after he had added it and a second story onto the house, had been his own room anyway) and shut the door behind him.

Clara Bovrul filled the Reader's Ranch's need for a housekeeper and did much more. She did all the cooking; ate only when standing at the stove; and at night when the housework was all done, she baked cookies for Kurt in order to get him to sit beside her on the couch (instead of going down to the Long Horn Saloon where he was, by agreement with the family, given well watered beer) while Clara made doilies after Mary McKewe's instructions. Clara placed her doilies all around the downstairs.

Augustus Reader had an unmentionable fear of Clara for her resemblance to his dead wife who had also spread doilies around. When he ate at the table and she ate off the stove, he never looked at her or talked to her, though he would refer to her in the third person, as if she were not there. He gave Cynthia money to pass along as house money and wages, but he shut her out of his room, preferring spider webs to her invasive doilies.

That winter Augustus, tied many trout flies and he invented an artificial trout stream.

By spring, Augustus had built the heart of his artificial trout stream on his fly-tying bench. It was a water wheel of tin cans and automobile parts joined on a portable platform to a pump. When the big run-off was over, Augustus and Kurt took the Whippet down to the river and brought back a load of river rocks of all sizes, including the angular boulder with some good moss on it. Then Augustus directed Kurt to wheelbarrow the rocks down the path past the mink yard, through the pine plantation, and to the base of the hill where the spring always gushed out of a pipe in the side of the spring house and fell about three feet into a pool.

Augustus had Kurt dig a new channel for the spring from the pool under the pipe to a point about twenty yards down, but in a dog-leg curve, so that, in its new channel, the water would run nearly twice as far. With the soil from his excavation, Kurt buried a pipe which ran from end to end of the old channel. Augustus directed Kurt to lay all the rocks they had brought from the river in the new stream-bed just where a stream would have put them, with the mossy boulder near the tail of the run.

At the very head, under the falling column of water, they placed the wheel and pump which Augustus had constructed over the winter, and they joined it to the pipe which ran to the lower junction of the old and new channels.

The pump began moving water up from the tail to the head of the run so that, for the new stretch, the flow was doubled. The artificial trout stream kept flowing. The only

thing it lacked, of course, was trout. Someday, Augustus said, they would go out and catch a mess of trout to bring back in a milk can; for then he was quite content to have Kurt wheel him down to the stream in the afternoon, or just to wheel himself down, and to dream over the water all afternoon. He hated to strap on the wood and metal legs anymore, and besides, his upper body had strengthened and he could get around better in the chair than with his "damn pegs." Augustus was so content with his artificial trout stream that he did very little each day after the morning mink feeding, and each evening Kurt had to be sent to bring him up for dinner.

With less household work to do, Cynthia was able to handle more of the ranching responsibilities, though her strongest wish was to let all the mink go. She watched and sketched them as they paced, with fore-quarters only, the fronts of their pens. She hoped for a way out for everyone at the ranch. She hoped and she worked and she waited.

After wheeling Augustus down to the artificial trout stream, would watch the water for a while and then wander toward town. He would end up the Long Horn Saloon, or look over the bridge railing into the river just above the caverns, or sit on the bench in front of Noah Davey's General Store.

By that time old Noah Davey had so few customers that he was suspicious of any that did appear, and always attempted to frighten off children, loiterers, and strangers.

Whenever Noah came to his store window and, by knocking and bulging his eyes at the window, tried to frighten Kurt away, Kurt only glanced at him and started talking to himself, so Noah finally let him stay on the bench. He was only crazy, and that was okay.

When Kurt had not come for some time to sit on the bench, Noah would even look for him, and when he did come, Noah would come out and give him a candy bar. One day as Kurt sat there talking to himself in two different voices, Noah shuffled back through his long store all the way through to his original, windowless cabin, where he reached into the pocket of an old black coat and pulled out a harmonica.

It was the very harmonica which, many years earlier, Black Jim Worms had found and brought back, when he discovered civilization advancing with iron horses toward Natural Bone, and which Noah had appropriated from him. Noah carried the harmonica out to the bench and handed it without explanation to Kurt. Noah Davey had thin, almost transparent skin devoid of pigment from long years in darknes and one could have seen the capalaries brushing his cheeks and forehead as he turned back into the store, the harmonica was the only gift he had ever made to anyone.

Kurt first, put one end of the harmonica into his mouth as if it were a candy bar, then he stood up, got the harmonica properly across his mouth and walked off, completely absorbed in blowing it. When he returned to the bench only three days later, he played in and out like breathing. He learned so well and so quickly that he gave up talking, not only to others, but to himself as well. So he told no one how he had seen a black ghost, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, sitting with him on the bench listening to him play.

Then one evening Kurt came, playing his harmonica, down the path to fetch Augustus for dinner. As he approached, two unmistakable native Brook Trout – an orange flanked male and a less brilliant female – rose from the pebbled bottom of the artificial trout stream and darted about with their heads out of the water until Kurt saw them and stopped playing, and then they sank quickly, becoming indistinguishable from the bottom.



Augustus and Kurt Reader drove to Robbie Grout's portable shack to tell him how Kurt's harmonica had made two trout appear where none had been. Robbie was quick to believe their story and was moved by it to share a secret of his own. He led them to his woodshed and, staying outside himself, told them to go in and look at the fish mounted on the wall.

***The fish was strangely high-browed
and glowing trout -- red, blue and black,
with spots like eyes down its flank. Kurt
and Augustus stared for five minutes,
then came back out into the ordinary light.***

Robbie told them that he had seen similar fish climbing Crumbled Falls and followed them to a shallow lake where they had gone down a spring hole and under a mountain. He told them how, after years of trying, he managed to raise a few of these fish from under the mountain, and then to catch one, only to have it turn to red powder in the air.

It was a few more years after than he managed to hook another such fish on a live butterfly at the end of a line on a twenty-foot tamarack pole. To prevent the fish from disintegrating like the first one, he dunked it immediately into a bucket of spruce gum which he had kept boiling and on the shore of that shallow lake for two weeks. The pitch-shelled fish seemed so alive and glowed so eerily on Robbie's wall at night that he was not able to sleep with it there, so he had moved it out to the woodshed. And though he

insisted that they not take another of these trout, Robbie agreed that he and Augustus and Kurt might put together one more trip, just to see if they could raise one with the help of Kurt's harmonica.

Robbie took two weeks to clear a trail wide enough for a wheel chair from Snail Rock, back up to the shallow lake at the foot of the mountain. Back at the Mink ranch, Augustus built a twenty-foot rod out of bamboo and ordered a salt water trolling reel to hold a hundred yards of quarter inch nylon rope, and he made up a box of large peacock winged butterflies and swan breasted moths. Each day for a week Augustus wheeled himself out onto the sand flats and practiced with his great rod until he could lay out fifty yards of line and keep it in the air. His arms got so strong in that time that he was able to wheel himself, alone, up the path from the spring, twice a day.

A week or so, the three of them went to Snail Rock and Kurt pushed the wheel chair over Robbie's trail to the shallow lake where he played the harmonica like an angel raised up a glowing fish at dawn. It reared up and walked across the water on its tail for a full twenty yards under the false butterfly, before it saw them and went back under the mountain. It was just plain magic. They were stunned and you would be too.

When they brought Robbie back his little place, he went to the woodshed and brought them the mounted fish. It was for them to keep.

Augustus hung the fish on his parlor room wall where it kept him awake some nights, and some nights swam burning through his dreams. Then one day while Augustus was back down at his artificial trout stream, Kurt walked up the wheel chair ramp and into Augustus' private entrance with an empty feed bucket. Kurt left the bucket on Augustus' work bench, took the fish off the wall and carried it into town to show to Michael Corbin Junior at the Long Horn Saloon and of the Natural Bone Hotel.

Augustus wheeled himself up at dinner time, went up the ramp to his room and immediately noticed that, whereas there had been a fish on the wall, there was now a feed bucket on the bench. In too much of a hurry to put on his legs and drive, Augustus wheeled himself back outside, down the driveway, and right down the middle of the road into town. By the time he arrived at the Long Horn Saloon, the game warden was already there, an argument had broken out among the white-powdered talc miners, the Sheriff had been called, and no one could hear Augustus when he called for someone to help him

up the steps and in. The argument got louder and louder and the sheriff came.

"Let me up in there!" Augustus said to him.

"Stand back!" said the sheriff and went in.

To settle the argument which was about whether or not the fish was real, the sheriff permitted the game warden to poke a small hole in its flank with a pencil.

***"Poff!" it went like a light bulb.
Suddenly the color went flat;
a scale seemed to form over the eye
and everyone dropped back in surprise.***

The sheriff stepped up and examined the hole, he could see that the fish was completely hollow. He invited everyone to see for himself. Some thought that maybe Augustus Reader, who was known to make artificial bugs, had painted the fish on the inside of the shell like someone might assemble a ship in a bottle. Michel Corbin Jr. said that, whether or not it was *real*, the fish certainly had seem *alive* before they stuck a pencil into it.

After listening to all this Augustus wheeled off in disgust, unnoticed by anyone else.

Since neither Kurt nor Augustus asked to have the fish back, Corbin kept it on the wall behind the bar of the Long Horn Saloon. Many lies and stories were told about the fish and the stranger who did not even drink came to the Long Horn just to see the hollow trout.



chapter 8

Professor Peckestone's Red Char

The story of the hollow trout in Natural Bone Hotel eventually reached Slade Peckestone, professor emeritus of ichthyology at Cornell University. He had come to study entomology at Cornell when there were still cowpaths across the quadrangle. On Ezra Cornell's fallow farm, he netted, sketched, described, coded, and preserved so many specimens so cleverly, that he was chosen to prepare for permanent professorship, held over into graduate school, and allowed to travel on university funds to the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico to follow the annual migration of Monarch Butterflies to a supposed wintering ground, which was, at that time, yet unknown to science.

Just as the steamer, came within sight of the jungly shore, he saw a great descending cloud of butterflies out over the ocean behind the ship. The excited entomologist

induced a deck hand to let him down in a life-boat, and he rowed off alone after the cloud of butterflies, which seemed to descend to, and under, the horizon.

He soon lost sight of land and got caught up in a circular current. This great and slow whirlpool brought him repeatedly over a large school of fish which, as he viewed them for the third time, seemed so noble looking that he wept and was converted from entomologist to ichthyologist on the spot.

The fourth time the current brought him over the school of fish, another cloud of monarchs descended over them. Each butterfly flew straight into the mouth of one of these rising fish, and all with no more disturbance than snow falling on water.

In the midst of this silent cloud, Slade Peckestone stood up, raised an oar and clubbed a surfacing fish for a specimen. The rest of the fish dove, the monarchs fluttered up and Peckestone rowed off with the dead fish under his seat.

Unfortunately for his career, the professor's fish decayed so rapidly that he was unable to document it very well, and, though he rowed out into the whirlpool every day for the rest of his stay in the Yucatan, he never saw another Red Char, as he had named the fish.

He theorized that they were the extant ancestors of all the New World Char-trout, adapted now to southern seas. He figured then that he could find their spawning grounds, like those of other salmonoids, somewhere in cold, flowing, fresh water. Though the university continued to sponsor him through his change of fields, and on trips up the coastal rivers of Newfoundland and Labrador, Iceland, and Greenland, he did not find the spawning place of the Red Char, but gained his professorship through a long essay on the olfactory sense of smelts.

One morning when his long fishing expeditions were well behind him, the professor found a baby in a basket on his doorstep. He had never known a woman who might have put it there, but he took it in and named it Charlie. Charlie was raised by a succession of live-in student women who were encouraged to read to him, and he entered Cornell University in philosophy when he was only sixteen and the professor was retiring.

Still, Professor Peckestone would march up through Cascadilla Gorge to his old office each morning, not because he had any work to do, but because he could sleep there with his head on the empty desk, whereas at home he dreamed each night since retiring that he was pursued by giant red wasps which bore down on him like darkness and death until he woke up with lumps all over his face.

One day the professor walked to his office to sleep and found a newspaper which someone had pushed under his door, featuring a story on a mounted trout in the Natural Bone Hotel. He recognized immediately his long sought Red Char. He went right back home, packed a suitcase, and drove north to Natural Bone without even letting Charlie know where he was going. That evening when a hatch of nearly red Gaddis Flies was rising like mercury up the warming river above the caverns, his black 1949 Dodge pulled off the highway and parked perpendicular to the curb in front of the saloon entrance to Natural Bone Hotel. The car's red tail lights stuck a foot out into the traffic lane, but there was no other traffic. The professor, wearing a low-crowned and wide-brimmed hat, got out of the car and stood looking back into it. His face, in the shadow of his hat, was so knotted in thought that it looked as if he had been stung by bees. His suit was of some worn shiny material, and it was black too, except for grey suede patches on the elbows and grey, faded armpits. The professor touched his hat, then went to the rear of the car and removed a belted suitcase from the trunk. He walked numbly up the steps to the saloon entrance, leaving the trunk lid up.

The only lights inside were a neon Schlitz sign and a glowing bar clock which indicated four-thirty. Michael Corbin stood behind the bar, an unlit cigarette in his mouth. Corbin lit the cigarette and looked the professor between the eyes, but the professor was looking up at the fish over the mirror.

Its back was blue as water, its flanks were red toward the high brow, shading into blue toward the tail, with spots like eyes and an eye like a cat's.

Just as the muscles around the professor's mouth began to twitch, as if he were about to make a remark, there was a loud crash of metal outside.

Michael Corbin ran around the bar, past the professor and out the door. The professor bent down, picked up his suitcase and carried out the door behind Corbin, who stood looking north up the street to where the professor's Dodge now lay on its back in front of the old gas station. Whatever had hit the car was not in sight. They watched the wheels slowly stop turning. The professor continued staring at the still wheels, but Corbin finally shook his head like a dog with ear mites, frowned at the inverted Dodge, and said to the professor,

"You'd better come in and have a drink."

"I don't drink as a rule," replied the professor, but it was not an ordinary, rule-following kind of day, and he followed Corbin back into the dark saloon.

Corbin went behind the bar and poured the professor a drink from a green, unlabeled bottle. The professor drank it down slowly, but without pause, and he noticed

the fish again through the bottom of his glass. He put the glass down and stared at the fish. Corbin filled the glass again, and the professor drank it down again without breaking his stare.

"I'm Professor Slade Peckerstone in Ichthyology," the professor tried to explain when he had finished his second drink; "I think I'll need a room." He was swaying on his stool.

"Glad to meet you," Corbin responded. "This hasn't really been a hotel since the railroad left town, but if you don't mind the dust, I can give you a room and a bed."

Corbin filled the glass again. The professor nodded and smiled. He drank it slowly down until his eyes had become mere slits, so he didn't even notice the talc miners who drifted in on their way home and sat down on either side of him, powdered white as ghosts. The miners were talking quietly about nothing much. Wondering why they said nothing about the wreck in front of the old gas station, Corbin went out and took a look. There was nothing there.

Corbin stared for a moment at that empty spot, then took out another cigarette and came back into the bar. He said nothing to the miners about the car, but took the professor's suitcase and led him up the narrow back stairs. The professor paused on every third or fourth step to sway pleasantly. He slurred finally onto a bed matted with dust, and he slept in his hat, dreaming all night that he floated down a red river through white foam in a big green bottle.

In his dream-rumpled suit, the professor emerged from the Natural Bone Hotel at six o'clock the next morning. He walked without thought of who or where he was, past the abandoned Esso station and then down the old road to Davey's store at the caverns.

A sign on the screen door said, "Open at nine o'clock only for customers."

The professor went to the window and looked into the dark store, up and down the aisles of dusty cans, ammunition, and old bread. Suddenly he noticed the old man in grey linen and wide suspenders, a thin goatee and flaring white hair. He knew this man from some dream. The professor tore his eyes from this vision as if he were trying to wake, and he hurried on, thrown into complete distraction. He walked on down to the bridge where there appeared to be a fisherman bent over the railing.

As he drew towards the bridge, the professor slowed and heard what he took to be the musical sound of flowing water, but then he saw a glint of metal as the man on the bridge straightened up and shoved a harmonica into his pocket. The face which then looked up at the profes-

sor was like a shadowing cliff.

"Good Morning," said the professor, "I'm Professor Slade Peckerstone." In fact he had only just remembered that.

Kurt Reader shoved his hands into his pockets and looked down at his feet. His feet started walking as if disturbed by their owner's gaze, and Kurt went up the hill to town.

The professor knotted his face and leaned over the bridge railing, looking down into the water so red it stained the rocks. He heard the harmonica again and looked up the road, but the musician was out of sight.

The professor looked at his watch and saw that it was six-twenty. He checked again at six twenty-two, at seven o'clock again, and then stared at his watch from seven-thirty until nearly eight o'clock. In no time it seemed the time had passed, but he could not see the hands move. Again he forgot what he was here for. He looked over the railing and couldn't see clearly as far as the water. Noise in his head drowned the sound of the river. He thought, "I am dying."

He went under the bridge and wet his face from the stream and immediately forgot his presentment of death. He looked under stones in the water and found Caddis cases of red sand clinging to the underside of liver colored rocks. He slipped one such rock into his pocket, along with a handful of river moss which he was unable to identify. He climbed up the bank with his samples and walked back up the road.

When the professor reentered the Long Horn Saloon, the Schlitz clock glowed ten o'clock and the morning light was just then reflecting off the polished bar up onto the side of the fish, making it look wet and alive. The professor remembered again why he had come to Natural Bone.

"I want to see the man who caught that fish," the professor said to Corbin, while looking into the eye of the fish.

"Kurt can take you to him," said Corbin.

The professor looked down. Until then, he had not noticed that the man he had encountered at the bridge was sitting under the fish, looking into a coffee cup. Kurt looked up at the professor.

"Oh, very good!" said the professor.

Kurt looked back down into his coffee cup. The professor stood, still looking at him for a moment. "Oh," he said, and sat down. Kurt drained his coffee cup and walked out abruptly.

"When will he take me?" the professor asked Corbin.

"Follow him," said Corbin. "He's taking you now."

The professor hurried out the door and back down the street. He caught up with Kurt just as he started down the hill, and by the time they had crossed the bridge and were starting up the hill on the other side, Kurt had stepped up

his pace so much that the professor was falling back. Kurt slowed, but kept twenty yards ahead of the professor all the way to the mink ranch.

They walked past the pens, down the hill in back to the spring house where Kurt stopped and sat down, leaning against the, stone wall and watching Augustus, who sat in the wooden wheel chair with a cigar stub in his mouth, casting his fly over the artificial tout stream. The professor saw how the water wheel which pump to circulate and increase the stream.

The professor finally stepped forward and cleared his throat. "Excuse me," he said. "I'm Professor Peckerstone. I'm in ichthyology and I'm hoping that you might help me out."

Augustus dropped his cast on the water and stared at the professor in disbelief. The professor stepped forward and explained how he had long ago discovered a fish similar to that mounted over the bar at the Natural Bone Hotel, off the coast of Mexico. As the professor talked on, hoping by more explanation to get a response, Augustus finally lit his cigar and reeled in his line.

"... and so," said the professor, "I have come to Natural Bone looking for the man who caught the Red Char."

Augustus chewed on his cigar for a moment. "Okay" he said.



At four-thirty the next morning, the professor woke, went down to the empty Long Horn Saloon, stuffed the green bottle from under the bar and two sticks of beef jerky into his kit bag, then walked to the mink ranch. Augustus Reader was already at the wheel of the Whippet truck. Kurt was sitting in the back, in the wheel chair. The professor put his kit bag in back with Kurt and climbed in beside Augustus.

They drove, rattling like a stove full of bolts, up into the woods and toward the dawning sun. Augustus and the professor bounced in the cab, looking off through the trees in the general direction of the river; Kurt rolled and swayed, playing his harmonica in the wind.

The sun was already up when they pulled alongside the portable shack beside the road. Robbie Grout was already out in his rocking chair. His right leg was crossed over the left, dangling one huge boot; he gazed over the trees across the road.

Augustus picked up his wooden legs by hand and put his feet on the Whippet's running board, then stepped down and stumped over to Robbie, Robbie

took his attention from the sky across the road and rose to meet Augustus.

The professor could not hear what they said, but Augustus turned and pointed to him several times. Then Augustus sat down in the rocking chair and Robbie Grout stepped up onto the foot locker, which was his front porch, and into his shack, to return in a minute with his hat, a pack basket, and a small pump rifle. Robbie put his equipment back with Kurt, then got his rocking chair and put it in the back beside the wheel chair. Robbie rode in the rocking chair beside Kurt, with the rifle in his lap.

They drove on up the highway and then off onto rutted dirt roads. Kurt went through the professor's kit bag and brought out the green bottle. As they came to a turn-off onto an old logging road full of black raspberry bushes, Augustus saw Kurt drinking from the green bottle, so he stopped, got out, took the bottle from Kurt, and brought it up front for himself and the professor.

The going was much slower from then on and they had to stop at each rocky ford to rest the engine and fill the radiator. At each stop they passed the bottle, but it did not seem to have much less in it than when they started.

They drove into the day, up out of the mists toward Snail Rock, which began to seem to be crawling toward them. They parked finally, right at its granite foot, just as the wind blew three crows across the sky from north to south. Robbie stayed in the rocking chair. So as to arrive at their destination at dawn the next day, they camped at Snail Rock, though there were hours yet before dark.

It seemed to the professor, another dream in which he was stretched out before the fire and saw Robbie Grout stand and climb down from the back of the truck, and Augustus Reader stand up out of the wheel chair. Augustus came close to the professor's face and asked him a question which he could not hear, but the professor nodded his head and sat up shakily. He was too weak and foggy to walk or talk.

Finally, Kurt helped the professor up and into the wheel chair which had been meant for Augustus. They put a blanket over the professor's lap and Kurt pushed him behind Robbie and Augustus, who walked ever so slowly over the roots and stones by the light of a pine torch. Kurt put the harmonica all the way into his mouth and played as he walked. The professor fell back asleep and dreamed of nothing at all.

When the professor woke, it was in the dark of a misty morning and he was still in the wheel chair. Fog

rolled through the little group which leaned together over him.

"'Bout half an hour," Augustus said.

Kurt handed Augustus the golf bag which he had been carrying over his shoulder. Augustus removed from it five sections of bamboo and assembled them into a rod with a cork handle as big as a bowling pin and butt section as thick as his wrist. The fog lifted a few feet and the professor could see the lake at their feet.

Augustus carried his completed rod like a flax pole, and with loops of thick line hanging from his big square hand, he started down the shore. The professor could see the whole lake now, shaped like an eye with the tear duct up between two little mountains. Though his vision was clear, he didn't feel his own body at all.

Augustus lumbered down the shore to a log jam, where the lake spilled out into a stream. He climbed onto the logs so slowly that he seemed to be nailing his wooden feet to the logs and pulling the nails behind. When he was finally stationed where he had room for a long back-cast down over the outlet, he tied on a white artificial moth nearly as large as a bat, and stood with it held between his fingers, waiting.

Then Robbie Grout picked up a rock bigger than his head and set it a few feet out in the lake. He stepped out onto the rock and squatted there with the butt of the rifle down between his feet.

Kurt waded into the water, sat right down in it, and then, to the surprise of the professor who looked out over a lone lily pad and an unopened lily bud, lay on his back with the harmonica in his mouth.

Then in the east, high up, the professor saw a great pine appear like a tree in the clouds, as the fog dispersed in a mare's tails. Augustus threw his big white moth into the air and began working the looped line out through his guides, downstream and then up over the lake, down and up, until he had fully fifty yards of line out and the moth was darting around just over the surface of the lake.

The branches of the big pine began to wave in a breeze that brought down three crows out of its branches, glided them over the lake and over the heads of the four men, down the outlet, and out of sight. Kurt drew a long breath through all the reeds of his harmonica and slowly rose to floating; the lily bud began to tremble the surface of the lake rang with tension.

Robbie Grout cocked his rifle. He pulled the trigger. The muzzle flashed and the bullet went unseen into the blue; the report cracked through the rock and wa-

ter. The sun came up like a bubble jarred out of a tar pit, burst, and spilled onto the lake; the whole surface quivered with light and music.

In that moment the water became so clear that it could not be seen. There was not even a reflection. And then, darting a foot above the rocks from the other end of the lake, a red and blue shape shadowed the darting moth.

Augustus kept wagging his tree of a rod, sending the moth and fish out to the middle of the lake and back towards the professor many times before he tired and let the line fall behind him.

Robbie stood up on his rock' Kurt sat up in the water; Augustus leaned forward on his rod and the professor held his breath.

***The Red Char swam right up
onto the surface of the water,
walking on its tail almost, and
then came to rest,
balanced perfectly on top
of the lily pad before the professor.***

He looked into its eyes. The lily opened, releasing a puff of yellow anther dust. The colors of the fish shifted and changed quickly as the dawn, the grew suddenly brilliant, flashing into the sun like Kurt's harmonica. The professor's heart pounded madly, struck by such beauty. He closed his eyes for relief. His face fell into loose folds and his head slumped. The Red Char flipped off the lily pad and darted away back to the other end of the lake and down under the mountain from where it had come.

Robbie Grout stood up on his rock. Kurt reared up out of the water and ran splashing across the lake after the fish. Augustus wedged the butt of his rod down into the log jam, clattered down, and stomped along the shore to the professor.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Wait a minute. I'll get Kurt and we'll get you to a doctor somehow."

"Oh no," whispered the professor, "let me stay right here." But Augustus, wading very slowly over the rocky bottom, floating each foot forward and then pushing it down, did not hear him.

When Augustus was halfway to the middle of the lake, the professor grabbed the wheels of the chair and rolled himself in to the shallow water. He rolled the chair across the bottom and arrived at the middle, up to his wheel hubs, just before August reached

the spring hole, in the middle of the lake, the professor removed his hat and set it on his lap. Then from straight above, Robbie's bullet buzzed through the top of his head, and a cloud of light burst out of his skull. Robbie Grout saw all of this.

When Augustus turned back with Kurt just a few seconds later, he saw the wheelchair in the middle of the lake, but the professor was nowhere to be seen. Augustus got into the wheelchair himself and Kurt pushed him back to the shore where Robbie still stood on his rock.

"Where did he go?" August demanded of Robbie.

Robbie's mouth was sucked in and sealed tight like a wound that has been healed for a long time. He turned and walked ahead, back toward Snail Rock.

"What happened to him?" August kept calling after Robbie, but each time he called Robbie speeded up and drew further ahead. When August and Kurt arrived back at Snail Rock, Robbie was in the rocking chair in the back of the truck with the gun across his knees. He didn't speak or look at them, but stared upwards, to where two crows flew from north to south, tumbling in some current high over Snail Rock. Nothing was said.

Nothing would be said later.

There was nothing to say.

They knew nothing.

***They didn't mean to kill anybody
and they didn't know if they had.***

***The gun was only supposed to
help the crack of day,
like the music and only magic.***

David S. Warren

co-editor of The Metaphysical Times

Author of three novels:

The World According to Two Feathers

Natural Bone

Dog's Plot: The Book of William



Ambient Music

in Science Fiction

AMBIENT MUSIC IN SCIENCE FICTION

by Peter Wetherbee

"Ambient music is a genre of music that puts an emphasis on tone and atmosphere over traditional musical structure or rhythm. Ambient music is said to evoke an "atmospheric", "visual", or "unobtrusive" quality. According to Brian Eno, one of its pioneers, "Ambient music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting." (Wikipedia)

The ever-brilliant Bruce Sterling, in his early nov Schismatrix, describes a futuristic musical instrument that resembles a cross between a digital sampler and a synthesizer. Sterling seems unable to resist a little editorializing which could be relevant to the use of samplers in contemporary ambient, among other genres: An artificial morning shone through false glass doors. Kitsune sat in thought, toying quietly with the keys of her synthesizer.

"Her proficiency had long since passed the limits of merely technical skill. It had become a communion, an art sprung from dark intuition. Her synthesizer could mimic any instrument and surpass it: rip its sonic profile into naked wave forms and rebuild it on a higher plane of sterilized, abstract purity. Its music had the painful, brittle clarity of faultlessness.

Other instruments struggled for that ideal clarity but failed. Their failure gave their sound humanity. The world of humanity was a world of losses, broken hopes, and original sin, a flawed world, yearning always for mercy, empathy, compassion... "

About midway through Walter Mosley's [new] novel Blue Light, protagonist Chance drinks the blood of his mentor Orde, whose own blood has been transformed by exposure to a magical blue light from outer space.¹

"When I woke up again it was night and I was alone.

The room I was in was large with a high domed ceiling. There was a big white door that must've led to some

hallway, and then there were double glass doors, covered in white lace, that went outside.

The moon was shining through the curtains. I forced myself to stand up and walk to the glass doors. I didn't feel strong enough to pull them open, but I moved the curtains to the side and gazed up at the moon. I can't express the joy that I felt looking up, being filled with light. Even the comparatively sterile light of the moon is filled with wonderful truths. With my heightened senses, I could actually feel the light against my skin. The tactile sensation

caused slight frictions along my nerves. It was like the diminishing strain of a classical composition that had gotten so soft a breeze could have erased it.

The music spoke of that spinning celestial body and of the sun's heat. There was a long-ago cry of free-forming gases and a yearning for silence. The universe, I knew then, was alive. Alive but still awakening. And that awakening was occurring inside my mind. I was a conduit. We were all conduits. With my mind I could reach out to the radiance that embraced me. But I didn't understand. I wasn't blessed by light. The potion Orde gave me opened my senses but gave me precious little knowledge. I was like the tinfoil put on a jury-rigged coat-hanger antenna -- merely a convenience, an afterthought with few ideas of my own.

The universe spoke to me in a language that was beyond my comprehension. But even to hear the words, just to feel them, filled me with a sense of being so large that I couldn't imagine containing any more."

Chance wakes up and immediately makes an assessment of the physical space around him. Mosley's prose throughout is sparse yet full of pure Ambiance in description through Chance's perception. The dimension and shape of the room, the reflective and absorptive surfaces of glass and lace curtain, and even an intuitive speculation about what kind of space lies beyond the door, are all quickly acknowledged in Chance's moment of waking.

The experience with the moonlight -- which draws him magnetically to the window, in spite of his physical difficulty -- involves an ecstatic response to the power and beauty of the light itself. The light waves "fill him up," however, in a way that is more than merely metaphorical: he continues by describing the physical sensation of light on his skin, which immediately translates into an extended "friction" throughout his autonomous nervous system. So far, Chance's experience has been a textbook Ambient experience

with the requisite spatial, textural, and trance elements. Mosley and Chance, however, feel that in order to fully convey the abstract beauty, joy, and power of the experience, it is necessary to describe it in terms of music and the sounds of the universe, which brings the whole scenario into deep Ambient.²

It would be gratuitous to over-analyze Mosley's poetic writing, which certainly speaks eloquently of the cosmos. There is, however, a nice irony to Chance's confusion at the incongruity of the depth and power of his experience not corresponding to what he is supposed to "know." His antenna analogy is no mistake, either -- both of these pieces describe the power of the body to perceive and conceive somatically, in profound ways that transcend mere intellect -- as he tunes in to the vibrations of the universe and has a massive epiphany. Chance's highly Ambient experience speaks more to his body than his mind, which can sense the ecstasy but not grasp it fully.

The reception and understanding of cosmic information was a hot subject in the early centuries after Christ. Iamblichus of Chalcis was a writer and philosopher who lived in the 3rd and 4th Centuries AD, and whose historic weakness was a fascination with "pagan" rituals and beliefs, which he attempted to reconcile with the all-important Platonic/Pythagorean tradition. In the following passage, Iamblichus documents the powers of Pythagoras to hear the music of the cosmos and use music to affect the psyches of others. It is interesting to note that the following translation from the Greek was made in the early 19th Century, separated, therefore, by roughly fifteen hundred years from the original writing. Furthermore, the magic and knowledge espoused by Pythagoras is speculated (by scholar extraordinaire Joscelyn Godwin, among others) to originate in Egyptian and Babylonian practices which easily date that same amount earlier, i.e. the 2nd millennium B.C. (!) The timelessness, beauty, and resonant truth of Ambient and its manifestations has been essential study for no few millennia, and we tread no new ground, but hope, as always, to underscore the sublime. This bit of wisdom speaks to Chance's inability to "understand" the cosmic information as it "explains" some of what he felt, standing in the window. It also tells the same story that most ecstatic or meditative musicians will tell when asked from whence comes thy creativity?

"[Pythagoras devised techniques for curing people by] divinely contriving mixtures of certain diatonic, chro-

matic, and enharmonic melodies, through which he easily transferred and circularly led the passions of the soul... through certain peculiar songs and modulations, produced either by simply striking the lyre, or employing the voice...he extended his ears, and fixed his intellect in the sublime symphonies of the world, he alone hearing and understanding, it appears, the universal harmony and consonance of the spheres, and the stars that are moved through them, and which produce a fuller and more intense melody than any thing effected by mortal sounds."

This melody also was the result of dissimilar and variously differing sounds, celerities, magnitudes, and intervals, arranged with reference to each other in a certain most musical ration, and thus producing the most gentle, and at the same time variously beautiful motion and convolution...Just indeed, as to those who are incapable of looking intently at the sun, through the transcendent splendor of his rays we contrive to exhibit the eclipses of that luminary, either in the profundity of still water or through the melted pitch, or through some darkly-splendid mirror; sparing the imbecility of their eyes and devising a method of representing a certain repercussive light, though less intense than its archetype, to those who are delighted with a thing of this kind...Sometimes, also, by musical sounds alone, unaccompanied with words, [the disciples of Pythagoras] healed the passions of the soul and certain disease, enchanting, as they say, in reality. And it is probable that from hence this name "epode," i.e. enchantment, came to be generally used.

It seemed for a moment that Mosley had done me the disservice of condensing my entire book into a few paragraphs of succinct and sublime prose. While his vignette encapsulates most of the key aspects of Ambient encounter, the ancient story of Plutarch reminds me that there are more questions. Some are echoed, if not answered, below, where Mosley picks up on the theme of music much later in the book. Juan Thrombone is a post-human wise man who expounds capriciously like Castaneda's Don Juan on the subjects of life, the universe, humanity, and even pop music:

"All the world is music, you see. There is music in atoms and music in suns. That is the range of a scale that you can see and read. There is music in emptiness and silence between. Everything is singing all the time, all the time. Singing and calling for what

is missing. Your science calls it gravity, but the gods call it dance. They dance and fornicate; they listen and sing. They call to distant flowers when buds ring out. Because, you see, it is not only atoms and suns that vibrate in tune. Rocks sing, as do water and air. The molecules that build blood and men also build the wasp; these too sing a minor note that travels throughout the stars. Greedy little ditties that repeat and repeat again and again the same silly melodies. They change, but very slowly, chattering, 'me me me me me me me me me....'" He repeated the word maybe a hundred times, lowering his head to the ground as he did so.

He smiled when he was finished and shook his head sadly. The next instant he was on his feet holding his hands out in the question Why?

"So much boring chatter for one so deep. Of course, the iron atom will say only his name. Water too and even granite or glass. Because iron has only one note; water two, maybe three. But you, my friend, make the violin seem simple. You are a song of the gods in the mouth of a fool. You can't help it. So much promise in one so weak attracts disease."

Man's humanity, of course, pales in the face of pure spirit, and Mosley's "fiction" is merely an echo of wisdom developed thousands of years ago. His discussion of music within and without all things and people is supported perfectly by Pythagoras' discussion of music's essential power to heal and combat the dangers of imbalance.

Juan Thrombone's alleged insult, however, could be a rough koan meant to inspire Chance to higher understanding; by the same token, he could just as easily be complementing his intuitive as he tries to bypass the intellectual. At any rate we are deep in the realm of Ambient.

Frank Herbert is another author of fantastic literature. As such, his freedom from the constrictions of our contemporary consensual "reality" allowed him to write a passage in *Heretics of Dune* (#5 in the Dune series) which elaborates on something hinted at by Mosley and Pythagoras above. Namely, the significance of preconceived notions in one's perception of ambient elements. Somatic perception by definition bypasses the mind. Intuitive perception bypasses any notions of what is being experienced, and is therefore free of any potentially limiting ideas about what "should," "could," or "is, and gets rid of that pesky "how" as well. For Ambient's strength, power,

beauty, and essence lie, again by definition, in what is not right in front of our eyes and ears. The more easily we can let go of the immediate, of "knowing" what we're experiencing, of naming, categorizing, cataloguing, and experientially ghettoizing a given phenomenon,

the quicker we get into the flow of things around it. The result of freely experiencing Ambient is an increased, interactive awareness of the cosmic in and around us.

Ambient helps us to get past our own preconceptions by dancing in the space, texture, and trance of, around, within and without the alleged business at hand.

"The smell and taste of the drink Taraza had given him so long ago still tingled in his tongue and in his nostrils. A Mental blink and he knew he could call up the scene entire once more -- the low light of the shaded glow globes, the feeling of the chair beneath him, the sounds of their voices. It was all there for replay, frozen into a time-capsule of isolated memory.

Calling up that old memory created a magical universe where his abilities were amplified beyond his wildest expectations. No atoms existed in that magical universe, only waves and awesome movements all around. He was forced there to discard all barriers built of belief and understanding. This universe was transparent. He could see through it without any interfering screens upon which to project its forms. The magical universe reduced him to a core of active imagination where his own image-making abilities were the only screen upon which any projection might be sense.

There, I am both the performer and the performed!

The Workroom around Teg wavering into and out of his sensory reality. He felt his awareness constricted to its tightest purpose and yet that purpose filled the universe. He was open to infinity.

Taraza did this deliberately! She has amplified me!"

The triggers employed in Ambient are as varied as its defining elements. Ambient has fascinated, mesmerized, scared, and soothed us since before we existed. It has been the secret weapon of musicians, shamans, priests, and fascists; the source of lifelong meditations for monks and factory workers; an essential byproduct of the mechanisms of the Earth and the Universe; and, currently, a form of popular

music, overt and out of the closet for the first time since being given a name by Brian Eno in the 1970s.

[¹ footnote: Before we leave the subject of light from outer space, it is worth noting some text I found on the internet regarding a phenomenon called "sonoluminescence": This scientific-sounding word basically translates to "sound into light." The idea is very simple--a small bubble, surrounded by some liquid, is bombarded with sound. Due to the high energies now in the bubble, it starts to luminesce, or produce light. While most people have heard nothing about sonoluminescence, it has great potential in many scientific areas. High on the list for many researchers is its applications to fusion, since it is predicted that as sound bombards a bubble, the temperatures can get so hot as to allow fusion to occur within the bubble.]

[² footnote: All wave frequency spectral chauvinism aside (and notwithstanding this writer's colorblindness), sound is where we go to describe ambiance as it is found on any level. Different types of waves, such as ocean waves, radio waves, and light waves, metaphorical waves such as waves of emotion, or even the representation of waves in visual imagery, are all described powerfully in terms of sound. There is a universality to sound that makes it irresistible as a tool for describing the sublime, ethereal, abstract, or confusing. Among the "arts," music is the lowest common denominator in terms of cultural sophistication, and the least demanding in terms of awareness. You don't even have to look at or pay attention to -- let alone think about -- music the way you do with the written word, visual art, film, etc. Everybody hears the radio, whether they like it or not, it seeps through as a "subliminal" tool in advertising, and the pure sonic landscape of any environment, urban or rural is inescapable. Even if one is completely deaf, the lower frequencies of the audible spectrum are felt as vibrations and rumblings. One could argue that because the sound spectra is made up of much lower, "coarser," frequencies, it is more easily broken down by the ears, body, and mind than the much higher, finer spectrum of light. The difference between a booming bass drum and a squeaking piccolo, for instance, is "greater," most would probably agree, than the difference between red and blue. But then again, perhaps I am merely a sonic zealot. Or maybe I paid Walter Mosley to take his beautiful description of experience with light into the realm of music and sound.]



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