



Zen Baptist

Poems by

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Triggerfish

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Zen Baptist

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To Jim Crow

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"Big Billy:"	<i>Burningword</i>
"Tin Man:"	<i>Eunoia</i>
"Faces:"	<i>Camel Saloon</i>

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Artifact

They had me waiting, 6 year old me, standing there in the dining room, among the fluted glass and crystal cabinets, the stacked china, waiting.

I heard the awkward 2-hooved clop clop down the hallway, coming. Advancing. The magi attended me in their middle-class after-dark leisure garb, a mauve Izod sweater, chinos, well-polished loafers and faces I'd never seen before.

The clop clop made the doorway, a gray goat walking upright between admirers, rheumy eyes intent with purpose, time out of joint.

They brought the goat up to my face. Its mouth sawed and drooled. It spoke of inevitable madness, abiding ruin, its words dark gifts. One evening taking away all my Sundays.

He left me with a shriek and lodged in some backward place of my brain to niggle and worry and remain barely hidden. Hot animal breath, a mental palsy, my gait unsteady to this day.

I dream of choirs of the fellaheen

Right here on the beach, I hear something.
In Heaven there are no disgruntled masses,
starving, picking through garbage dumps.
I hear:

The street kids in Costa Rica sniff glue, a type
of commercial product. They prostitute themselves
for it.

I'll leave it with you:

I slept in these dunes once and encountered angels
in the early a.m. Like a troop or something. They told me they
were heading inland to rescue an abused child named Kafar.
"So God doesn't sleep?" I asked. They laughed and departed.

The rover boys vacation in the tropics every winter.
Deacon John. And the "Right Rev Bishop T Chickenwing."

The days become a tunnel.
A place of passage. A conduit
connecting death and birth.

I keep listening for the fellaheen, or a choir
of "froggy native boys" without guile. Surely,
island life has given them song.

Listen:

We will not sing, just now, of our life
among the stars; where nothing hurts,
where pain is not even a concept. We
would tell you to look within your frantic bosom
to where the vein of gold runs.

There is a type of moral bankruptcy.

Behind me the continent broods and steams.
The fellahs lead an abject life; they sing sweetly;
they wait for liberation.

Some in each of the 9 choirs fell away.
How is it possible to forget what was lost?
An existence as silver, gold, precious stones?

There are no castrati
among the fellaheen sharecroppers.
They sing, not like a chain gang laying track.

To find something in sleep.
It's not easy even if you've never lost it.

The outrigger bobs near the sand.
High tide is flooding the Happytime Tiki bar.
A waxing gibbous moon begins its setting.
Frost begins its crenellation.
Watchman. Watchman.

The King of Joy

John Galen Holliday MD is being moved toward morality.
He does not know this, consciously; he also does not know
his subconscious mind is rooted in God. He feels unworthy of such intimacy, anyway.

This morning, Doc is surfing the net concerning the Enlightenment.
He finds the *Savvy Skeptic* site that sees this as a crucial advance for humanity.
He finds the *Thundering Hoofbeats* site that traces all modern ills back to this era.
It is either a liberating move away from the hegemony of revelation or
a crucial triumph of Satan moving us thankfully closer to the culmination of the ages.

Doc finds an ironic glee in the profound difference between the western
and eastern ideas of enlightenment – from faith to reason to cessation
or from chattering mind to quiet mind to freedom from birth.

Doc is vaguely theistic.
He still remembers the words to “Jesus Loves the Little Children.”

Doc has taught Chipper, his parrot, to say “I think therefore I am.”
Or some form of it. Chip sometimes mimics the doorbell at 3 or so in the morning.
At various times of the day he curses resoundingly.
Brother Tim, Doc’s friend and neighbor, says the bird is demonized.

Wanda, having just now awakened for the day,
slips up behind Doc and kisses him on the head.
Our John is absorbed by the *Boson Jim the Gospel Sailor* website.
There is an article on John Newton, the Anglican pastor
who wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace.”

“I’ll fix breakfast,” she says and turns for the kitchen.
Doc reads on. It seems Father Newton was a rake-hell in his former days.
He was first mate on a slave ship during the African slave trade.
Jim tells John that the 2nd birth changes everything with just a short prayer.
John thinks this is much faster than eastern enlightenment.

Wanda is neither a theist nor an a-theist.
She has never had any significant thought about God.
Her family is just not religious. None of their minds have ever gone there.

Doc leaves his desk and goes to the kitchen.
He takes a seat at the round kitchen table.
Chipper is out of his cage and in the living room.

"Doong doon doong doon."

"He never does the doorbell during the day," says Wanda.

"Chip's not quite right, I don't think," says Doc.

Brother Tim is a Catholic hermit. He lives down a dirt road in a nice cabin.

A priest comes out and says mass for him each morning. And so on.

He takes long walks through the woods. One path leads to Doc's place.

"Yodelayhi, yodelayhi, yodelayhihooo." Chip is in an open window.

Doc sets out a yellow pill and a white pill.

He is taking 5mgs of Valium and 8mgs of Dilaudid morning and evening.

This gives him a mild euphoria 24/7.

Tim knocks at the back kitchen door.

"Come in, Brother," says Wanda.

Tim sits at the table and Wanda sets a brimming plate before him.

"You think therefore you are." Chip is in the den.

"I had the most amazing experience last night," says Tim. "I dreamed I saw God, or actually I saw him literally pouring himself into space and time.

All the forms of life, all life poured from him into the universe,

and the stream was joy. This gave him incredible joy. He imparted this joy to all life. The stream was... joy." Tim is overcome with emotion.

He grasps Doc's hand.

"And Jesus' passion. It was underlain by joy. What he did was so significant.

And he did it out of love... in joy." Tim weeps.

Wanda wipes a tear.

Doc pushes his plate away and rests his forehead on the table.

"#0X@#/X0#XX#DX!" Chip is in the foyer.

"Come to me, Chip," says Tim.

The parrot flaps into the room and perches on Tim's shoulder.

The hermit strokes the bird's downy green breast.

"All creatures great and small," sighs Doc.

You and Your Caucasian Manger Scene Self

Phil stops by our common hedge
to conference. I am around 11 a.m. buzzing
on caffeine and nicotine and diphenhydramine.
Christmas nears.

Hear Phil:
"You've got one of the Wise Men right,
but the rest of it is all wrong."

I bought this manger scene at Lowes. I
did not manufacture it. No. And so on.

Phil and I are both suicide attempt survivors.
We haven't a clue as to why we are here. How
could we have become neighbors? Why?

Eurydice, Phil's wife, squeals and cannonballs into their pool.
I can't see into Phil's back yard, but I know the sounds.

Phil had a Near Death Experience.
He died and went to hell. An EMT jump-started his heart.
He is alive once more. Decidedly.

"I'm committed to this one for the season, neighbor," I say to Phil
at the common hedge. "Can I hang out by your pool?"

There is no repentance in Phil.
He says his NDE was only a mental projection thing.
I had strange dreams of an alien chick and
our timeless love.

Phil hates our late mayor.
Phil saw our late mayor in hell.

Eurydice starts the boombox.

My alien chick had blond hair and spoke
Martian. I understood her to say:
"Give up on the handy death thing.

We won't allow you to go like that."

Pool area:

"Another toke from your smoke makes me tighten up my stroke!"

I have not heard that song in a long time.

"Can I go groove with Eurydice at your pool?"

Phil says everyone in hell is busy cursing God.

"Don't you have your golf foursome this afternoon?" I ask.

There is a level of folks in me who curse God.

They are children. Outraged children.

I know Eurydice's pool habits.

The people in hell curse God. They believe
he could help them but he won't.

I carry a tribe who thinks God sleeps.
And so God is cursed roundly by this plebian chorus.
Each dead because of what sick people did to them.
Dead children.

Phil has a crucifix with a sub-Saharan African Jesus on it.

"I've got a new edger, Phil. Why don't I go edge around your pool?"

I would join Phil's woman in everydayness.
I would sing of her sweetly to trees, bricks and mortar, well-tended grass.
I would sing sweetly to her. Of the carpool, Girl Scout cookies, a mortgage.
Nothing changes in the day, nearing noon. There is no utility of myth
among the streets, driveways and garages full of junk.

Juice

Pete Strangelove, *(a man of only average upper-body skeletal musculature)* is most himself after a day's good labor. Everything about him now, however, is air-conditioned. He uses his mind and voice and soul to earn his bread. He seldom sweats. His preaching, on Wednesdays and Sundays, is also climate-controlled.

(In humans, the soul is the clothing for the spirit.)

Pete goes to the county jail on Thursdays carrying the Gospel.
(Most of his flock there is possessed of significant upper-body skeletal musculature. Most of them pump iron in the evenings on the yard.)

(Both soul and spirit are immaterial.)

Inmate Johnny Boyer, *(a truly strapping fellow who has never been in close proximity to a barbell)* believes that bad things only happen to weak people.

Pete takes up serpents when he preaches. He has a favorite Eastern Diamondback named Bill Jr. Next week, he will try to take Bill Jr. into the jail.
(Bill Jr. has no upper body.)

Barbie Weiren, a rape culture spokesperson *(with minimal upper-arm skeletal musculature)* advocates the rape of men who think that a woman somehow cooperates in being raped.

Hear her: "Any man who says 'You can't thread the eye of a moving needle' should be bugged on the town square at high noon."
I swear; I actually heard this.

Pete's preaching is also "air-conditioned" because he does not believe in Hell. This would be heresy if his sheep knew about it. He has a place in his heart for Jehovah's Witnesses because they do not believe in Hell, either.
(On average, Jehovah's Witnesses have average upper-body skeletal musculature. On average, Pete's flock has only average upper-body skeletal musculature.)

This evening,
Pete is immersed in the stacks of the William J. Diamond Theological Seminary. He is researching Oneness Pentecostalism. Pete's denomination is of this flock. He has only recently discovered this. He does not yet know its theology.
(Pete will soon enter said seminary and become licensed to preach, officiate at weddings and so on. William J. Diamond has pitiful

upper-body skeletal musculature.)

(Thought Nazis.)

As Pete is discovering, Oneness Pentecostals reject the doctrine of God as Trinity. Hear them: "God is a singular spirit manifested in 3 different ways, and not 3 distinct and eternal persons." *(On average, Oneness Pentecostals have only average upper-body skeletal musculature. Thought Nazis have amorphous natures and a piddling level of upper-body skeletal musculature.)*

Pete meditates. Hear him: "God as 3 persons. God as 1 person 3 ways.... There isn't much difference. It was the Catholics at their councils, during the great apostasy that Luther rescued us from. Constantine. It must have come through Constantine." *(Our emperor, of course, was puny, having meager upper-body skeletal musculature. Catholics on average have only average upper-body skeletal musculature.)*

Now.

(Jesus is a man with exceptional upper-body skeletal musculature. Mary, his mother, has well-defined upper-arm skeletal musculature for a woman. No one knows this because of her modest habit of dress.)

Pete will soon go and pump iron at the Bill Harvey Fitness Emporium. Bill is a professional bodybuilder and has exceptional overall skeletal musculature. He injects Deca Durabolin. At contest time he takes Lasix. He could never be a victim.

(Around contest time, Bill Harvey is ripped. He diets away all subcutaneous fat. His hypertrophied skeletal musculature is freaky. Pete has Bill's poster on a wall in his garage. Pete has written "freakazoid" on it.)

Pete pumps iron because, as a very young child, he was molested by his Uncle Rob. He has no conscious memory of this. He thinks he works out for his health and to attract women. Bill Harvey is in the magazines lifting a Cadillac El Dorado's front end.

"The Gospel is the Gospel," mumbles Pete in the library reading room. He has recently whooped twice over the content of his reading. Librarian Sally Joiner will not warn him a third time. *(She is in a sleeveless dress that reveals her corpulent upper arms.)*

Pete has fond memories of Christmas at Grandma Strangelove's big house in Atlanta, of leaving for home with the car laden with lately opened presents, of Uncle Rob on the front porch waving his penis.

Pete is in heresy because of his faulty eschatology. He is moving toward universalism. He likes to preach, and he enjoys the fellowship; he enjoys people. In about 5 months, for no apparent reason, he will believe in Hell, again.

Someone has left a few books on the table at Pete's elbow. One of the titles is *The Earth Is Only 6,000 Years Old*. Uncle Rob had minimal upper-body skeletal musculature even though he occasionally pumped iron in Grandma's basement.

Pete is a serious fan of Bruce Lee, but he has only a yellow belt in karate. He could have a black belt, but he has trouble with self-sabotage. This is why he in no way resembles Bill Harvey, either. (*Bruce Lee had amazing upper-body skeletal musculature.*)

(Pete will be called "Hound's tooth" at the seminary. My mind was tampered with shortly after its inception, before I was 1 year old.)

Many of the classical Greek urns have depictions of noblemen engaged in sex acts with boys. This pederasty was an institution.

(In Hieropolis, on the western plains, the gateway to the underworld emits foul vapors. Phillip the Apostle died in Hieropolis.)

Petesy Boomershine Strangelove (*a comely woman with well-defined upper-arm skeletal musculature*) knows all about Pete's molestation as a child. She sleeps with him and hears his ongoing nightmares from it. Swami Brahamanda tells her to keep quiet about this.

(Phillip the Apostle had excellent upper-body skeletal musculature. Hear him: "I saw Yeshua, talked with him on the first day." Phillip was nailed upside down through his heels to a tree.)

A moment's peace reverberates along the lifeline, affecting past and future. (*Swami Brahamanda has superb upper-body skeletal musculature.*)

*(In all voodoo ceremonies there is a chevalier moment.
In the late 1800's, the prestidigitator Swain Larson had neither arms nor legs;
however, his pecs and lats were well-defined. He also had a mean 6 pack.
Chevalier occurs when a voodoo priestess is ridden by a loa. On average
voodoo practitioners have average upper-body skeletal musculature)*

Pete smokes Pall Mall menthol 100's, filter-tipped.
When he was a young man, only high-level rednecks smoked
the unfiltered Pall Malls. Kurt Vonnegut Jr smoked them.
Pete has read *Player Piano*. Our Kurt lived to be eighty-four.
(Kurt had excellent upper-body skeletal musculature.)

I was going a little over 100 miles per hour after I left Havana.
A guy was still dogging me, so I locked up the brakes a few times.
That is the only memory I have of the entire trip

All the images have lodged in your head. They are all still there.
Everything you have seen. Swami B is obsessed with intergalactic travel.

I thought I
would go deep into the Amazon basin and find
that next stone-age tribe *(who on average have average upper-body
skeletal musculature)* and who have never heard or seen a white man.
Taking the Gospel to a Mensa convention would entail more risk.
*(On average, white men have average upper-body skeletal musculature.
Mensans on average are especially endowed with above-average
upper-arm skeletal musculature. They are in the top 2% of earth's population.)*

Pete often thinks of the guys at the gym. They have strength;
they have juice. And so on. In his head, mostly subconsciously, he believes
people with hypertrophied upper-body skeletal musculature, especially
those versed in a martial art, possess a defining vision, a way to live,
a vital hedge against pernicious people

Choice

I threw down a pair of handcuffs; they landed next to his .45.
He reached down and took up the gun. I had no choice.

The elephants at the zoo are as docile as I imagine them to be.
The hippopotami and the alligators likewise. The snakes and
the camel on which my son rides, too.

I know from the choice,

--we sit in the park eating chutney--

the heartbreaking choice I get to make all day long,

--a spoonbilled ibis is an ugly bird--

this somehow matters; it is all life-changing,
at even the most banal and basic level;
it all matters.

I add motherboards at this assembly station.
I must do it right in a brief span of moving time.
All our computers have these. The users
provide the variables, *are* the variables.

It's like the Bardo Thodol, and there is a book
to help you traverse it. A book of the dead,
only helpful after death. It assumes we carry knowledge
with us when we die. After we exist, here.

Wherever the Chief goes there follows a service guy
carrying a fancy attaché case called "the football."

I take no thought for my memory,
heart rate, breath, body temperature,
blood pressure, deep brain structures as real
as archetypes.

Within the football are the means for thermonuclear destruction.

There is always the moment point Bardo.
Intermediate state between then and eventually.

“The shrooms took over. I saw hundreds of these
little gnome dudes stepkicking across a stage,” he said,
on a ward for decompensators.

I don't do well in a threatless world;
I need a threat, real or imagined, constant.
Out there.

Tiger has ridden a rhinoceros and a giraffe, here.

“Little gnome dudes, each dressed as Santa Claus.”

Jenna played me songs
and made me coffee when Elvis came on.
We talked of the plight of various indigenous peoples.

In the park with me are 2 lesbian poets who work
as part-time college English instructors. As do I.
We all agree, the curry has just the right amount
of turmeric.

Ichthys

Chorus:

"What about your thoughts, brother? A good tree bears good fruit. I have a device here that can tell me exactly what kind of thoughts inhabit your head. It works off your brain's magnetic field. It reads brainwaves and action in specific brain areas. It detects hormones in the blood, there, too. And it is all about the neurotransmitters. I'm going to show you some pictures after I attach this other little device to your penis. Okay?"

I am hammering 1 irons this afternoon, at the range.
I set up for my slight fade. By playing this particular shot,
the worst I can do is hit the ball straight as a line.
I don't even think about draws or hooks.
Or any problems on the left side of the hole.
I am pretty much sure of a shot keeping me on the right side
or only down the middle. With long range and mid-range clubs,
I look for the shot to be about straight until as it comes down
it trails a few yards right.

Willard is in his 70's. He was a chiropractor. He is an alcoholic.
Hear his slurred speech: ". It has chicken dickths in it. Potted meat.
It has dog meat in it, too."

Chorus:

"With our device we can spot serial killers before they get started."

I accomplish this fade shot by having a few more windings under my grips.
This slows my hands as they rotate through the swing
and causes me to contact the ball with a very slightly open clubface.
Hence my fade.

I used to like potted meat.

Chorus:

"He went to a medical doctor and told him his lies to get his feel-good
scripts. And the doctor said to come back in the morning dressed like
Ronald McDonald and the scripts would be waiting. So what did he do?"

Willard is one of the smartest people I have ever met.

Do you feel his ontological being?

Chorus:

"I'm glad my ears aren't loudspeakers."

The resistance fighter meets his contact and says:

"Mrs Hargiss had a bunion removed."

The contact replies: "It was on her left foot."

The fighter has a British accent.

Jack Nicklaus accomplished his slight fade this way.

Someone told me a story about a signifying monkey in a tree verbally abusing a guy on the ground named Dolomite.

I saw Jack win one of his Masters.

I saw him at the missile silo in Kansas, among the farmers.

I was never in Vietnam. It was someone else's excuse.

Oh, how easy that would have made things.

Chorus:

"You are a keeper of poisons, a purveyor of oils and salves.

You are some thoroughly misshapen creature.

You have a shirt that reads: 'Does not play well with others.'

You were caught outside the Garden of Gethsemane with a chainsaw."

Dolomite:

"Let me tell *you* about *your* mother."

At the range, I'll put 2 buckets of balls 280 yards out in a neat 10 by 10 yard footprint. Near the end of his playing days, Jack Nicklaus totally changed his swing dynamics.

He kept the fade.

Volcanic catharsis.

Chorus:

"It is something that happens all at once. A total release of anger; it needs vengeance just as the body needs water. It reverses earlier fissions that sent experience fragments in all directions; it draws these back into the waking psyche where they are noticed for the first time by everyone."

I need just one moment to figure out and resolve, to confess,
and the world changes. People give you absolution. You
can then move on. This seldom happens, conflict resolution that turns
neatly on a dime, not likely.

I got drunk and slapped a stewardess on the rear.
The flight diverted to Houston. Marshals came aboard and took me away.

Yesterday, I walked along the blooming pear trees on 18th street.
A prosthetic leg hung on a high limb of one tree near 10th Avenue.

Chorus:

"Hardscrabble beatitudes. Kitsch. Satori, never enlightenment.
There is no inner circle, no deeper place where it all makes sense.
There is no defining esoterica. You cannot lay your burdens down.
We should have been a Buddhist."

The balls I use on the golf course have an aerodynamic dimple pattern.

Chorus:

"He always says 'Well hello there.'
And he calls me 'young man' and dusts the ground before my feet
with his fingertips or if he is near a table or similar surface he lays his
hand down and flops it over and back several times like 'a fish out of water.'"

Bing is my caddy's name. His father was lynched in Columbus, Georgia.
I have a fish with the Greek word "ICTHYS" in it on the back of my car.

I believe every bit of malfunction comes from emotional pain. It is the pole
around which all the people spin, revolve, oscillate—I am mud! I am
a loathsome species! And I damn well have always known it.
I speak of fractal knowledge on a lawless plane of animal being.
Chaos. Utter malfunction. Concupiscence. Errant desire. Concupiscence.
Errant desire. Disordered will. Disorder at the base, being, disorder. I am become
discordant.

I saw Arnold Palmer shoot a 67 at the Atlanta Open.

Chorus:

"A mood disorder has travelled with you always, a sense of dread.
You turn suffering into a gift when you unite it with Christ's suffering
and you quit trying to see the hand of God in it."

I will go tonight to the Jazz Club and watch a one-armed piano player who is called "the Left Hand of God."

Chorus:

"The sacrifice of God on Calvary's hill satisfies.

Life is not all birthday cake and ice cream.

Vesuvius erupts. The rocks break.

The magma gushes forth.

Things change."

The stuff tortures me every day; it will not leave me alone.

Chorus:

"See everything as exercise necessary to make you fit for heaven,
a necessary purgation of error. Do not try to understand it all.

God's ways are as far above our ways as the farthest star.

Do this and life can be birthday cake and ice cream.

You will taste this."

The Journey

1) Separation

When I was little, in the garden,
I found a chameleon swarming with ants.
My father came over and crushed it with his foot.
This upset me. "It is too sick,
and it is suffering terribly," he said.

We hunted deer, wild turkeys and hogs.
As a teenager, I tried to stop my dog fighting with another dog
and killing it. I had realized by then that the natural world
was just the way it was, and I should not make a judgement about it
in terms of good or evil.

In my early 20's, I awoke to the distinct sensation
of choking. My sheet was pulled tightly around my throat.
No one was in the room. I managed to call out "Jesus, help me!"
Above my bed a dark cloud moved toward my open window
and with a buzzing sound passed right through it.
Looking out the window, I could see the cloud pass over a field
and gradually move out of sight. I heard the buzzing diminish as well.

The Gadarene demoniac was a man.
At first, Jesus talked to something in him
that was not him. A Roman Legion was two thousand men.
St Mark says there were two thousand pigs.

Love has pursued me all of my life.
Something antithetical has also traveled with me,
some common and base perversion of life's essential ways.
It seeks to draw me down dark corridors that lead on
into an ultimate absolute darkness, blackness. It wants me
to revel there. I have not always drawn water
from the common stream.

I have never sought to play this nihilistic endgame.
The darkness seeks through circumstance and opportunity
to effect my will and bend it. It knows
it cannot usurp my will and totally take it over
unless I yield my will up. I have done this.

I cannot follow my every inclination.
I need conscience to inform me.
Joseph Campbell tells me "Follow your bliss."
What if my bliss is disordered?

I have learned that human nature can be twisted and arcane,
adept at evil. According to our missionaries,
the friendly and flowing savage can be just as rotten
as the civilized man. According to those who study them,
the great apes, our closest genetic relatives,
also behave badly at times.

The bones of the poet, Hart Crane, lie off the coast of Florida.
He was returning from a Guggenheim sponsored stay in Mexico.
Around noon, with a hangover, on April 27, 1932, he took off his topcoat and jumped
the ship's rail. A sailor had beaten him the night before.

We all go south to some degree, south, all gone south. The southeastern man
seeks dissipation south, travelling south, down to southern climes, a relaxation of
mores,
a values inversion, equatorial latitudes, direct sunlight, steaming noonday jungles,
mental heat— separation, underworld, no return.

2) Initiation

A priest once told me of the mundane nature of demons.
They are fallen angels and their intellect should supersede ours,
but this does not always seem evident in dealings with them.
Aquinas tells us of the nine choirs of angels.
St Michael expelled some from each of these choirs.

I saw and experienced the paucity of Luther's god
every Sunday, every week, every month, every year I can remember
until I was 12.

Awful things happened to me as a young child.
At 15, I began drinking beer and smoking pot.
I had strange blackouts. I did things that I did not remember.
People saw me at events I did not attend.

I would get high and pray to Satan, as I had been instructed,
for worldly success. Mephistopheles never appeared to me,

however, and I would see little of the favor I sought.

There is something in me now that wants to torment me,
destroy me. It feeds off my misery. It counsels me to die.
I have teased out its voice from my inner stream.
It tells me I am seriously flawed in my very essence.
It tells me I am hopelessly separated from God and my fellow man.
It tells me that self-murder is a "beautiful consummation".

This is more than just an inner critic, some introject
of my father's verbal abuse. I have lived this way. I live this way.
I will no longer live this way.

3) Return

The bedlam in my head and heart contains a single note
that is life-affirming, harmony in the greater discordance.
I must listen closely to hear this. It, too, is always there.
It is a still small voice. It is decided in the authority
of its benediction.

I seek to tame my mind.
I study eastern ideas about this, especially Tibetan Buddhism.
I read St Anthony and the Desert Fathers on spiritual warfare.

I believe the malevolent influence is outside normal human experience.
It is there even in my earliest memories. I am not insane.
I try not to listen to it or entertain its thoughts, anymore.
I no longer identify this malignity as me. I have
been tested and found to be otherwise mentally healthy.

Smarter folk than me tell how certain terrible events early on
can open up a doorway that evil can pass through.
God allows this. I have cursed God soundly many times,
but he is still there for me.

As a child, I suffered a fundamental insult.
I did not store these events in narrative memory.
The language of such terrific emotion is not verbal.
It is a talk divorced from mind, a cipher coded into soma
in pain, and extreme muscular tension. Amygdala mediated

traumatic experience is beyond words.

Enoch walked with God and was not with us anymore.
Elijah was taken up in a fiery chariot and was not with us anymore.
Usually, no angel takes the victim-child out of this world.
He or she carries the weight of others' trespasses. He or she is a goat
driven off into a mental wilderness, a lively vessel
carrying a cumulative burden of sin.

*(I can remember nothing bad about the grownups,
the people who take care of me. They know all the good things.
They seem happy. At nursery school and Sunday school we sing,
"Jesus loves the little children....")*

There is a rumor of final comeuppance in some of the world's religions.
The idea of hell is no balm for such a wounded soul who
on a deep level thinks/feels that he or she is also outside of God's love and
deserving of torment. Self-esteem has been banished by the very self.

*(If it's my fault, I can somehow stop it from happening again by being good.
It is my fault. I deserve it. I'll change something. I can be safe.
Jesus will help me and make it stop.)*

This is a death-in-life sentence, a hanging on until a little bit of light, a few photons,
leaks in – the fruit of prayer? the dint of perseverance? outrageous fortune?
evidence of God?

What I cannot accept about life or myself, I project onto another.
There is something in me that needs to accumulate misfortune
on a single soul. The outer boundaries where evil must attempt victory,
for me in the war to end all wars, can be one person.
His suffering ensures my healing. His death and resurrection
gives me hope.

I am a spirit having a physical experience.
Light through trauma's prism is not nurturing or constructive. The soul bleeds there.
But only the physical can instruct and cause hyperboreal growth. This is a type of
learning
the spirit suffers death to acquire.

She had been

“Out of what?” she asked.
A picture of something, I guess.
She was oceans to me.

When time keeps us going
long after we would have ceased.
The winding cloth of the American Dream
reduces my speech to common gutturals,
choking sounds.

She had been a Tibetan Buddhist nun.
After the cattle prod it had taken her 3 days
just to move her bowels.

We began to talk about forgiveness.

A white streak in her hair like a lightning flash.
On a very dark night. I dreamed of it.

In the go and come of any given day,
her story is as Dracula, Frankenstein, or Hell.
It is like a well-done sci fi tale on an ice planet
in another galaxy.

At coffee on the Starbucks sidewalk. Alone.
A newspaper. She hijacks my mind again and again.

Meditating, and her story conquers me.
I will never be in such peril. I won't.

The silence of the garrote, voiceless; the silence
and thrashing arms, kicking feet, useless
hands. Just the notion
of no control.

Big Billy

Coalmaster, stoker of purposeful flame,
worker of the bellows of hell, adept
of the infernal majesty.

Years later, Mama visited him in Washington.
He was lobbyist for a lathe turners union.
They ate lunch at Ollie's. A waitress fawned all over him,
said he had paid doctor's bills
for her son; rank

humanitarian, Exalted Cyclops, klavern keeper,
you couldn't get the n-word out of his mouth
with a shotgun.

He stole heat from fire;
water boiled and became vapor at his command, a change
of state; he was a keeper of dark mists, magus
of the four winds.

His steam drove the turbines that create
reality; he was a wizard of the first order, someone

who realized you could disembowel a man
and it would not kill him right away.

Yet More Techniques of Ecstasy

I am a human right now. Sometimes at night I
turn into a wolfman, or vampire, or poet. Young
people find this distressing. They want constancy
from adults. In this earthly body there is that illusion.
But if I look closely, especially at my sleep, I see hints
of change, a blessing, the benison of my life along the narrow road.
And if I watch my day closely, I find that it is shot-through with magic,
insinuations of freedom, nonlocality,
a foot in the fairy's world.

"I go mad simply mad when I hear a yodel."

Why do there have to be demons in this?
I have always wanted to be Frankenstein's monster.

Every hard time may not really be necessary if I realize
my soul can just as easily grow from pleasant things, love,
joy, peace, right moral accomplishment, the gaining
of good knowledge. If I stay there.

"Hoop dee doo, hoop dee doo, I hear a polka
and my troubles are few."

Little Johnny had a lot of head sense.
He kept his heart in abeyance. He knew
stuff.

"As it echoes through the canyon clear and true."

Sweet Matilda carried a symphony in her chest.
Feeling good without any pills. A natural
human.

"Hoop dee doo, hoop dee dee, this kind of music
is like heaven to me."

How long will I have these symptoms?
They travel with me. I was
raised in a viper's den.
Dread.

“ ‘Cause it makes me want to sing Yodelay hee hoo.”

I said the word “quietus” among them
and they began to use it. (Perry Como appears
to never need the release of death.)

“Hoop dee doo, hoop dee doo has got me higher than a kite.”

This is the esoterica, now; we are
moving down to it, the undergirding
elements no one ever examines:
bilateral symmetry, bipedal locomotion,
binocular vision, grey matter.

“Yodelay hee, yodelay hee, yodelay hee hooooo.”

I am trying to concretize my going to Mass
this morning. In memory.
It fades.

“Hand me down my soup and fish....”

There are techniques of ecstasy no one ever examines.
No one consciously uses them, but we all use them.
We maintain the equanimity. She and I
met on a psych ward.

Time.

Pleasant madness.
I have become a crow.
I call that self Billy D.

The exalted and holy goof, Pete Strangelove, has written
a new and needful Bible verse: “Jesus laughed.”

I simply must know what happens after death, what to expect

I watch my sky burial from the eye of a vulture
in the blue and wispy day. This is the place of thin air.
I was dead flesh among the rocks. I am an essence, something beyond
body and mind and "I am." Nothing is yet "is"
and everything.

At 13, I watched Uncle Rob's 6 pall bearers. His students, soon to be architects,
standing at the ready. Consulting angles. Logarithms. Slide rules. Looking for
a mathematics of death. A system of death. Trying yet
to build upon its structure.

Nothing came back.

Uncle Rob's was the only funeral I have ever attended. He
was all about grand gestures. Rob had rooms brimming
with shelves of books. He had an amazing record collection
and stereo. He took up golf. He took up fishing. He took up camping
and got terribly sick on his first trip. He studied bull fighting. He was
an amazing redneck designer of buildings and houses
and swimming pools. He had an English copy
of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Always
on a quest. He taught me about
Frank Lloyd Wright.

I was mostly unconscious for 54 or so years.
I lived vicariously through others. I stayed out
of my head in a seamless becoming.

After Rob died, in the few days after it, I dreamed
I was in Grandmama's house and she was leading me
to a secret room. In the room, Uncle Rob sat in a comfortable chair.
He beamed. Grandmama said "See, Rob's alright." And
I knew it was so. And one of my cousins had the same dream.

Grandmama was a Zen Baptist.
Someone swept away the mandala.

When I almost died, I entered nothing,
a lightless beingless nothing. Days.
I came back in my dream state.

I didn't realize life yet clung to me. In an ICU,
I dreamed of controlling elevators through force of will.
Of taking myself to a higher floor. Something
to do with the heart.

An extraterrestrial blonde-haired woman came to be with me.
She spoke a Martian tongue. We had been together since Creation.
We developed a ruse for living together until the death of the universe.
What she said welded me back to life.
And so on.

The Bardo Thodol is a place of after-death.
There is a schematic. One can learn from it
and escape from birth.

Janice and I will be buried in a cemetery in north Georgia.
With no embalming or coffins.

I am not my body.

There is a level of violence and anomie needful
to satisfy. And a moral moment-point around which the story turns.
To be alive in dreams.

Janice and I will be beyond the consideration of any night workings
of our subconscious minds, dreams, that gentle tyranny.

Socrates talked of God and drank the hemlock for a final moral point.
In the West, most of us are unaware at most times, now.
The unexamined life.

I am untroubled by the vultures and worms.
I pass. I leave. I encounter an epic loss of words. Or light.
Of that city. Angels. We will sing "Holy. Holy. Holy."
And I will finally understand what that word means.

Imminent

I have never been this old. The days flit past.
I rapidly head for something. I think I know
what it is. Will there be any warning? A bell? A buzzer?
An apparition? I want to see my grandparents. Sometimes
I treated them shabbily. They always seemed to love me.

Gangan took her own life. She had a long history of depression
way before Prozac. And Pawpaw was dying. Grandmamma passed out a lot of money
amongst her grandkids. The day I first heard the song *American Pie* on the radio
she gave me 20 dollars. Always a crisp new bill. My grandfather died
when my mother was 3.

Now I know the questions. I always wanted to ask them
how it really was to exist in a body. Was it safe? What about a Creator?
Any evidence for this? They were all just boring Protestants, as was I.
No ritual, no miracles.

Pawpaw let me drive him around in his car when I was 14.
He was a Zen Baptist. He didn't consciously know this.

Is it safe in a body?
Could my grandparents be murdered? Or starve?
They sent affirming messages back to me.

Sex?
I knew they'd had sex enough to account for my parents
and aunts and uncles. Did they yet need it?
Did Gangan moan? Intense pleasure, surely
they had no need of that anymore.

Pawpaw's car slipped off a dirt road in south Georgia.
He wanted to get home and see his children, my mother and uncles.
He was driving too fast. Deadly love.

My grandparents never discussed pain with me, only oblique references to God's
sovereignty. Even when my uncle died, young. Once, when I was driving
them through the north Georgia mountains, on precipitous roads, Pawpaw began to
sing
When the Roll is Called Up Yonder I'll Be There. Gangan told him

“We aren’t going today. Choose another song.”

All these people have left this life with no important answers for me. I didn’t really know the questions. At the time, and I couldn’t then have phrased it this way, I would have asked if they had some deeper access into life’s esoterica, inside stuff that makes it all make sense? Something to do? Or just some way to find joy? (*I am no longer fully human.*)

My grandparents taught me about how love delights in being shared. They fed me as I grew into the world. Their grace was in the draining down of the common hourglass. It was in their no-ultimate-answers brevity. And their abiding silences in the face of dying.

Death is as much a part of life as birth. I guess I will see them in Heaven. Is it really a place where I “just have to wish to make it so.” Were they born again, there? Another helpless nativity? Another hesitant maturing with more answers this time? A further mythic place to graduate into?

That is too much like karma. They did not believe in that.

I grow into what my grandparents became.

Heaven. They will tell me why its streets are paved with gold. Why precious stones still matter, there. And light. And the absence of tears.

The Kingdom of Hearts

*Everyone was glad. What a time they had
at the ugly bug ball.*

--Sherman and Sherman

I have no facial affect besides incipient anger
and that only manifests as a mild furrowing above my eyes
and a grim determination around my mouth.
My face does not turn red or anything.
I was taught that anger is a major sin,
even a hint of it. I am angry for days.
A simmering rage abides in me
for no apparent reason.

"Golf is about as interesting as watching flies mate," says Bing.
I ask him for a five iron. It is 205 yards to the pin.
There is sand behind the green.
The flag moves listlessly in a left to right wind.
Jack Nicklaus is considered to be only an average sand player.

I need a defining drama, an overarching challenge
to make the present moment real, to keep me in it.

I nail the five iron a few feet to the left, pin high.
It is a most satisfying shot, flush on the clubface;
I feel the solidity of the shot
in my hands and arms and shoulders.

I need a passion, something to stay lost into all of my life.
I need mystery steam. I need it to seep and hiss from the corners and cracks
every once in a while, only a hint of transcendence.

My putt is about ten feet.
It will break to the right about 6 inches.
The grass is a crosswise grain.
Bing removes the flag.

Everything I do must matter.
It must advance my soul.
There must be a greater purpose
for everything I do and whatever happens to me.

My putt wants to break but the grain holds it up.
The ball stops an inch above the hole.

When I smile, I must make sure it shows on my face,
turns my mouth up at the corners, forms
happy lines around my eyes.

Bing replaces the pin. He relights his pipe.
He is close to 70. His father was lynched in Columbus, Georgia.
There is a photograph. It is of a carnival atmosphere.
That evening, the murderers got to return to their lives –
families, jobs, denominations.

On the next hole my drive fades a bit at the end.
It is close to 300 yards but in the first cut of rough.

I am a firefly.
There is nothing for me to do but burn brilliantly
through brief insect years with insect determination,
resolve.

Bing always walks ahead of me.
If I catch up to him, he falls back.

At the end of all this,
I will be known as the man who cursed God,
not out of anger or spite
but only to experience forgiveness.

Exhumation

I am no better than a ghoul. Here,
in this fizzing light, I pop the coffin's lid with a crowbar. As a young child,
I helped my mother plant tulip bulbs at the end of a spectacular winter.
Later, I went back and dug them up.
Early Friday morning,
outside a dungeon, a Roman guard heard Jesus
evacuating his bowels. Poets are a different bird.
What sensibilities will this coffin contain?
I wanted to see the flowers, the secret,
the beginning about to fight its way
through the dirt to attain the light.
I wanted to help them, too.
Speed them on their way.

Tonight, all around the mausoleums and Garden Club Trails
in Memoriam, the air is freighted with rumors of the dead.
Epitaphs traced in slug's trails. There is the faint hum
of worms attacking like drill bits. Time is no salve, here.
Even memories decompose.

The angel in the water shouts. The ferryman
takes the coin on the next dead poet's silenced tongue.
Will he sing, again? The muse has consumed him.
He is only a shell. The silence of astounded souls rises.
This is an embrace, of sorts. Where have you gone?
Nothing comes back. Nothing.

Dilettantes will fight me for this one. This incorrupt one.
Cheating with a waxen mask and the odor of roses.
Relics. First class. I bend to my work. A finger or two.
A rib. Inner ear bones. Tongue. The brain will be rich
with residual sensibility. His spirit has spread out
over a vast plane of being consisting
of tangential people whom he loved.
Or maybe it hasn't.

Soldiers are lucky. They can blame it all on a war.
They can center their pain, there. My poet
battled elsewhere on the common plane, the field,
the ongoing skirmish. "Dead Poet" is on his marking stone.

“Now,” too. And a line from a poem:
“He grasped hard and made the universe turn
on the pivot of an outstretched hand.”

Milton's Hero

Before Hercules broke his chains,
Prometheus had moments of rest;
everything done in a day, forever,
all that screaming each morning,
the sated eagle gliding off
on an updraft. A type of rest.
(Was the bird also immortal?)

Prometheus seems to have a good heart.
So does Camus' Sisyphus. I believe
in a heart of gold. I am drawn
to the troubled, or even the secretly troubled.
I am versed in the lingua franca of pain,
pain as a common denominator.

I rest my head on a stone each night.
I dream of a ladder going into the earth.
Demons go up and down upon it.
I wrestle with them. I am wounded in the fight.
I will not submit to any Faustian bargain with evil.

Satan also, from time to time, accuses me.
"How do you know your first suicide
attempt was not successful?" he asks.
"You are actually in some state
beyond death you cannot leave,
maybe purgation, or...." I say,
"This cannot be Hell
because I still have hope."

I am only the concupiscent hero;
I never sin unto death.
I have read Joseph Campbell and Frazier.
I feel I am on the classic hero's journey:
separation, I live it;
initiation, but I haven't crossed the Styx yet--
I quarreled with that blind ferryman;
it was a clash of codependent egos--
return, I am with you still.

Faith abides in the ruins of faith.
Love abides in the ruins of love.
Everything depends upon the weakness of our parents
who believed they could be like God.

Sipping coffee on my porch early one morning,
I saw Satan in the form of a beautiful serpent.
He tried to reassure me of his sympathy.
We talked awhile.

I assured him
that the well-being of the universe and all its inhabitants
still depends, ultimately, on the death
of a single Galilean. And his rising.

This always upsets him terribly.
He has no palatial home in hell.
Nothing glamorous here; only waiting.
“You are just another mud puppy,” he tells me.

Tin Man

I push an organic carrot into my juicer.
Cooking destroys the enzymes in fruits and vegetables.
Raw food reminds my body to heal.

I am keeping Henry, Kookoo's pot-bellied pig;
he grunts and sighs around my feet. I drop him scraps.
"I smell barbecue," says my Cockatiel, Chipper.
He paces in front of the dishdrain.

My chorus tells me: "I, John Galen Holliday MD, have a heart of stone.
It is as inscrutable as a stone." They use the first person to fool me
into believing they *are* me. I no longer believe this.

Henry snorts and nips at my ankles.
He waddles over into his litter box and pees mightily.

My chorus is six grungy old men and two semi-hot women.
They gather into a condemnatory knot near my backdoor.
They grouse:

"Ahh, potbellied pigs are unclean animals, according to Moses," they volunteer.
"Your crazy bird will outlive you, paltry man.
You'll never stop drinking. Hah!" And so on.

"High level white trash," says Chip.

(Twenty five percent of alcoholics recover in 12 step programs.
Forty seven percent of alcoholics on a high-sucrose junk food diet relapse.
Thirteen percent of alcoholics on good diets relapse.
With treated hypoglycemia, 71 percent of alcoholics stay sober.)

Henry's hooves click click on the kitchen floor.
He takes up at my feet, again, grunting and sighing and nipping.
I drop him a banana peel.

"Throw another piggy on the barbie," says Chipper.

Under a pier, down at the levee, where the homeless sleep,
one finds empty bottles of liquid hairspray.

Cockatiels are native to Australia.

(The heart has its own mind, separate from the brain as evidenced in development when the embryonic heart beats before the brain is formed. This is the embryo's first working bodily system.)

God had a body, here, among us. How did it feel to him? Its limitations — the need to eat, sleep, defecate? I do not malign my body. If my body is sick or weary, my soul suffers. It is with my body that I work out my salvation.

I swallow a Prozac. I am a jockey of my neurotransmitters, a keeper of neural esoterica. Today, I covet serotonin.

Last week, Kookoo told me:
"The Tin Man he already had a heart. He just did not know it."

(On March 22 of 1990, the FDA banned tryptophan supplements. On March 26 of 1990, Newsweek's cover featured a 20mg capsule of Prozac.)

Kookoo is from Haiti. She knew incredible poverty there. I went to the island to research the chemical basis of the zombie powder. She greatly helped me in this. I brought her back to America. I married her in a civil ceremony so she could stay here legally.

"I don't have to speak, she defends me, a drunkard's dream if I ever did see one....."
My chorus likes The Band.

"Take a load off Annie...." so does Chipper.

I will go to the Emerald City and ask the Wizard to give me a heart. I have been out in the rain, again; I need some oil on my mandible joints.

(One in five alcoholics recover. One in eight liver transplants is for an alcoholic. Withdrawal from alcohol is more dangerous than withdrawal from heroin.)

In the book, the Wizard of Oz is a carnival pitchman, a phony. Heart, like soul, is not physical.

(Analogies always break down. A metaphor compares

two unlike things.) I am awash in animals and ne'er-do-wells.
Yet I am rooted in joy. Love suffuses everything.

My heart will beat around 3.2 billion times if I live to be eighty.

There are pills in my bedroom. There is liquor in my wet bar.
Once, my emotions were inevitably painful. Now
something new is happening.

The Tin Man despaired over killing a grasshopper.
I, too, would do no harm.

Nick Chopper helped Dorothy get back home.
She helped him get a heart.

Faces – I have been, I am, I will be

Kookoo, my friend from Haiti, has exported her old ways. She collects footprint dust, hair clippings, nail pairings, waxen kewpie dolls. She is a user of hatpins, pins with knobs on one end. She is a chanter of blessings and curses, a friend of many loas.

Her mythos explains good and evil and joy and sorrow. In her world, if I am adroit, I can avoid at least egregious suffering.

But there are two in my world that remain: physical hurt, emotional hurt. The last is the worst. Alcohol once helped. Twice I have spent years addicted to pain meds and benzodiazepines. It was my feelings, my rollercoaster, sometimes hour by hour, up, down, up and down. I lied about severe headaches. I did have some arthritis. I lied about my level of physical pain.

For me, it is easy to believe in “the fall of man.” My will is disordered. History declares me to be dangerous. There is a savagery in my nature. I am the Arab slave trade. I am World War 2.

I am also capable of great love and forgiveness. I am Nelson Mandela. I am the Dalai Lama.

I ask myself if the Catholic God’s justice is too much other, if it is just too pure for me to understand. Can a choice I make or do not make in this brief life affect my being for eternity? Sometimes I would choose annihilation. If I believe God’s ways are as high above mine as the stars, I can better make sense of suffering.

I have studied eastern religions. What if reincarnation were true? What is the point? There is still some fundamental inadequacy in that universe, too much suffering, too little chance to escape it. An endless cycle of birth and death. The blind turtle and the golden yoke floating on an infinite ocean. Endless karma to tote from life to life, to satisfy for. A terrible justice to be appeased by my suffering over aeons.

Kookoo tells me about a man in her village who was turned into a zombie.
One day he became sick and died shortly thereafter.
She attended his funeral. Some months later, he was seen laboring on a distant farm.
He had no will or volition. He did not respond to his name.

What is the cause of disorder?
Why do 99 point whatever percent of humans seek its explanation
in metaphysics?

Did I have a face before I was born?
Will I have a face after I die?

Kookoo has a potbellied pig named Henry.
Henry pees in a litter box. He opens the refrigerator door
with his snout and grazes. He sleeps with Kookoo.

Henry is basic, simple. He moves between pleasure and distress.
He seeks the former. He vocalizes both. He is an open book.
His subconscious is all about mud-puddle coolness and slop.
It, like Kookoo's and mine, is directly connected to God.
Henry dreams in his sleep.

This morning Henry has a can of premium dog food for breakfast.
He has been in captivity since day one. As he eats, he is loose in a hardwood forest,
in the fall. He grazes for acorns under a live oak. He possesses no knowledge of
humans.

In that glen, his face is always pig. There is no concept of past and future.
It has always been a pig face. It will always be a pig face. It is a pig face.
For Henry, bliss is an ongoing state of being, something in which he moves.
No catastrophic scenarios play themselves out in his mind.

Henry does not move with fear. His joy is basic.
Henry is continuous. Henry is.
Kookoo and I may or may not ever be.

Interpreter

Mose is pretending to be deaf, today.

Millie is doing hand signs, translating the early evening at the Storyteller Goat fountain. John Galen Holliday MD is in attendance. Chipper, a Cockatiel, is on Doc's felt top hat. He flaps over and lands on the Storyteller's goat head.

"XXX!###OOO!!," curses Chipper.

Millie pauses and then does her sign language for Mose. He concentrates. Doc wants out of it.

"If you take up the first donation I will expose you," says Doc.

Millie signs. Mose never takes any largesse.

Chipper preens in the mist.

Goth teens are here. Also

6 or so members of a local Satanist coven.

The streets thicken with evening traffic. Millie signs for this noise.

Tonight is Walpurgis Night.

At the nearby zoo, in the primate house, a keeper tries to interest Gertrude, a mountain gorilla, in sleep. They communicate via American Sign Language. The ape is disturbed by a nightmare about a poacher kidnapping her son.

The Visigoths and the Ostrogoths helped in the demise of Rome.

Walpurgis Night is more important to pagans than Halloween.

Chipper swoops down and does a crash-and-burn on some pigeons on the Methodist church's closely groomed lawn.

"Ignorant synanthropic creatures!" Chipper squawks.

Neat well-trimmed grass. Befitting the sons and daughters of John Wesley.

Millie signs. Gertrude has never been in the wild.

She has no offspring.

The Satanists brood in their malignant tether.

They draw power from the he-goat Storyteller.

They are in synch, each one. Unequivocal.

They seek to do the next wrong thing. Earnestly.

Resolute will. Stars flicker in the night sky.

The Goth teens are irresolute and unfocused.

A young mother and girl child takes a seat around the fountain.
The child is a newborn. The mother talks sweetly to her daughter.
Millie signs this for Mose. Doc's mind reels. Some
of the children he aborted looked like this.

"So mote it be," says a Satanist.
There are general grunts and sighs.
"So mote it be," say the others.
Millie signs.

One of the Goth kids says "Yo."
These groups are strangers to each other.
Millie signs.

Mose is an idiosyncratic Catholic deacon.
Some days he pretends to be blind. On those days Smiley,
his seeing-eye rooster, leads him about, crowing vociferously.

The night is young. Millie knows Mose
is not deaf. He is her deacon.

"Do what thou wilt is the whole of the Law,"
says a Satanist, quoting Alistair Crowley.
Millie signs.

One of the Satanists teaches a youth Sunday School class
at a big Christian church. Two of them teach in public schools.
One is a scoutmaster.

Millie points to her head.
Mose signs "I am okay."

Susan, at 17, is the oldest Goth teen.
In their off hours, they watch re-runs of The Addams Family
and The Munsters.

Satan was active in the death of God. These 6 or so faithful
will be active in the death of a missing child, later in the night.

Alistair Crowley is on the cover of
Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band et al album.

Millie is a former hooker. In the pre-dawn hours,
she once worked this same area. She is now
an ed-tech in a middle school speech setting.

The Goth kids watch Bella Lugosi's Dracula movies.
Millie's father was deaf.

Mose is convinced that the soul of Martin Luther yet
resides in purgatory.

Satanists do not go to a Protestant church to steal Jesus
in the bread and wine. They go to Catholic churches.
The conflict is as old as time.

The young Goths read Baudelaire.

Alistair Crowley was a heroin addict.
His mother nicknamed him "the beast."

In Sven the satanist's apartment, a well-worn copy of *Paradise Lost*
rests on a bookshelf. On the lintel above his kitchen door,
the Body Blood Soul Divinity of Jesus is hammered fast with a ten penny nail.

Doc is not speaking to Mose.

Millie had 7 demons. Father Will exorcised Millie, dramatically.
Demons often come back and seek to re-inhabit her. They co-opt
her thoughts, seeking again to control her will. This is
very much in and around Sven, now.

How can someone be totally outside of things?
The serpent in the Garden had arms and legs.

The young Goths listen to Bauhaus.

Alistair Crowley is the Satanists' Paul.

Millie can hear the nearby demons.
She can sense a malign presence.
Doc feels compelled to drink premium beer
and take opiates and benzodiazepines.

The Visigoths and the Ostrogoths helped in the demise of Rome.
During the French Revolution, a whore was enthroned on the altar
of the church called Notre Dame.

Spiritual warfare is needful at the fountain.
The battle undergirds spacetime. It is more active
and fundamental than the 4 forces of physics.

Millie will sign the nearby life for Mose who is not deaf.
Mose will sign the unctions of God who often seems
distant and obscure. Sven will sign the unctions of Satan who
would convince everyone that he does not exist.
Who will sign for the Goth kids who now stand between
what is light and what is not?

A Big Engine

Every morning Mose
recites the Emancipation Proclamation
in front of his bathroom mirror. He lives
the remainder of his day from this place, this heart space.

You take a turbine, a big engine.
In science class one day Mr Boston showed them a Faraday wheel.
Mose believed it took power from the air. Today
a student like him would be labeled ADHD. Mose
was only beaten by various teachers.

Whenever Mose rides a rollercoaster
his most common utterance is "O God!"

Mose likes the photographs taken by Thomas "Snowflake" Byron,
a friend who photographs clouds, frost, dew, snowflakes.
He is a 300 year old watcher of the skies, a keeper of cloud esoterica,
a husbandman of mists.

Mose has never hallucinated or heard a disembodied voice
or seen a non-existent person, place, thing.

Our Mose is a deacon at Our Lady of Good Harbor Catholic church.
John Galen Holliday MD has recently become a Catholic Christian.
He has always been a bon vivant, purveyor of oils and salves.
He is now a keeper of the copious esoterica of Jesus of Nazareth.

Doc often says:
"It is not any passion of belief. It is the validity
of a real encounter."

This morning, Mose had a vision.
In his heart, on his front porch, he saw Satan
in the form of a multi-colored serpent, very pleasing
to the eye.
In his front hallway, Doc listens to Henry's heart through a stethoscope. Henry is
Kookoo's pot-bellied pig. His breathing seems labored, just now.
(The thought police are merciless to ensure sound thinking

according to the course corrections of the present day, the all-inclusive zeitgeist of all-inclusion, today. They watch, in diligence, for unfavorable behaviors, especially words, that reveal underlying inappropriate thoughts.)

Today, the ineffable mystery music-- chanting actually-- plays in Mose's head. It is all oohs and aaahs about God's ways being only vaguely obvious, cryptic in mercy and forbearance, terrible mercies, vituperative touches, strikings blind and lame and voiceless. This is not Mose's experience.

(Castaneda aside, leaving behind Hunter Thompson's fear and loathing, Doc now realizes there is no true chemical enlightenment.)

Mose's heart is a big all-determining engine.
He allows it to power him through life.
Jesus is there. Mose often feels he is zooming toward great joy.

Bishop in Time

algorithm (def- a set of instructions that leads to a predictable result)

At the 5 points fountain, a common pigeon
rests on the owl on top of the Goatman's crozier who
is seated on a pedestal and teaching, from a book, an assembly of animals all
under the aegis of water falling like rain. Five toads at the points
of a pentagram jet the water from their uplifted mouths and pause; water
that would escape something succumbs to gravity's tether and returns,
again and again.

Always.

Life is riddled with magic, shot through with it. Spirit
impinges even into the realm of sleep, a gentle kingdom
of sense, nonsense and nightmare. A syncretistic place.
Slumber. (*Once, on the Argentine grasslands, I saw
a great white heron rise on angel wings big enough to fly a man.*)

John Galen Holliday MD is alone, today, really alone. No chorus. Alone.
His chorus is 6 grungy old men, 2 semi-hot women and Jeanette,
a project-dwelling cynic. They have refused to accompany our John
for a day or so. He tried to have them exorcized. Truculent Doc
and his obstreperous self.

For the bronze-green Goatman, sheened in water, auraed in sunshine... surely
he does not signify for darkness, an encroaching apocalypse, a sinister thing
requiring "rapture," so bad no one wants to be here for it. Conspiracy.
He is only a representation of a Goatman. He is impervious to water, weather,
malice, love. Some artist forged him. Did he exist before the melting of the metal,
the pouring into the mold?

Across town, at the New Crescent Temple, food is set in front of the various statues.
Someone wakes them up each morning and bids them goodnight each evening.
"The gods and goddesses are all the same god, nameless and without form."

At St Pachomius Catholic Church, candles burn in front of statues of Joseph and Mary.
Joseph's staff is in bloom, indicating his fitness to be the foster father of God. Mary
wears a crown in May.

In the nearby intersection of the 5 said streets, Doc sees the Knights of Dixie Marching Band.

It is 1965 out there, just now. A phalanx of mean white guys burdened with various musical instruments seethes under the traffic lights, trying to form in a past day's traffic.

(I am a gaucho. I ride the pampas and throw a weird lariat.)

Time shifts. Time's sleight of hand, a magician's pass. Doc finds himself meeting Wanda Kowalski for the first time. That time expands all around him. It is for Doc. They are hugging. Soul stuff. Doc has never been so sure of anything down to his marrow and the busy depths of his subconscious. Something about life begins, again. At the fountain.

Now.

The parade was the next Saturday. The center is not here. The center cannot form, here. This is the past. Exactly 22 years from this particular past day, around the corner, at the New Women's Clinic, someone will leave the dumpster door open. A crow will peck at a blue baby eye.

Doc's chorus is of the classical-Greek-play extraction. They once did an amazingly thorough job of ruining his present moment. Catastrophic. Stuff.

Sheriff Buford Ramspiddler, the real life hero of the Talking Tall movies, told the Knights of Dixie to march, today, in 1965. He is lately doing senescence in a vegetative coma on the edge of a white man's bardo. And so on.

Doc likes his peaceful mind. He is content with it. He is actually considering his chorus to be a bunch of exorcized demons. His head did not spin. He did not vomit and spew. Strange runes did not form on his stomach. He smokes by the fountain. His weight. He feels light, airy.

Time shifts. Time's sleight of hand, a magician's pass. Doc finds himself as a newly minted MD. That time expands all around him. It is for Doc. His father is hugging him. Today, he is a grateful survivor of a most impressive education. Healer. A new life begins, again. At the fountain.

Now.

Our Goatman never blinks. He cannot move. He is only a sculptor's whimsy in a fountain in a city in the South of North America. Goofy white men

want to lead off a parade set for another day in a long-gone present moment. They are unfortunate earthbound spirits, all the time. And time carries them. As long as they want it to do so. Freight.

The Goatman informs various animals. What? What is he teaching? Frogs, dogs, sheep, rabbits. Time is unstuck, here. Doc is going back and forth through the decades. And he always does this; and he is always doing it; and he will always be doing it.

Doc is unmoored in time. Doc is alone. His mother died in childbirth when he was 7. It was the day, 9/14/1963. Four girls would die in a Sunday School class the next morning.

The Goatman does what bishops do.

*(I am become the Lord of Time. I expand. I am boundless.
I am the sum of a lot of peoples' prayers.)*

Time shifts. Time's sleight of hand, a magician's pass.

Doc finds himself joining the Catholic Church on the Easter Vigil, 2007.

That time expands all around him. It is for Doc.

"The body of Christ. 'Amen.' The blood of Christ. 'Amen.'"

Father Kevin hugs him. Heaven begins, again.

At the fountain.

Now.

In his bones, Doc knows he exists in this lively benediction suffused with love, sense, Spirit. This stuff is easy for him because these predominate. Yes. Really. God pours himself into time in a myriad uncountable ways and floods Doc's heart which is shaped, always shaped, for that.

Repetition Compulsion

Reverend Bobby Sampson, pastor of New Canaan Baptist Church, has asked Reverend Bill Diamond of the Church of Jesus Christ With Signs Following to speak to a deacon's breakfast today at 10:00 a.m. He met Reverend Bill while riding public transportation. They sat next to each other on the bus.

Both reverend's cars were in the shop. Both men sported King James translation Scofield Reference Bibles. They are both dispensationalists. They bonded immediately.

For no particular reason Rev Bill talked fondly of his salad days at Easonian Ishkooda St John Baptist Seminary. Rev Bob waxed warmly about his salad days at New Market Freewill Hope Baptist Seminary. As the bus meandered through a large urban housing project, Rev Bob segued seamlessly into regeneration followed by baptism. They both denounced the papist heresy of baptismal regeneration. As the bus churned up the side of Red Mountain, they trampled out a few other common vintages.

It follows on this fine ecumenical morning that Rev Bill parks his late-model Cadillac in the Baptist church parking lot. He pops his trunk and takes out a mildly rattling and hissing burlap sack containing Bucephalus, a fat eastern diamondback rattlesnake. Rev Diamond is 67 years of age. He is taking a med for his hypertension, and it causes his mind to ebb and flow at times. His congregation calls these ebbing mental tides "the vapors." And if he gets angry they call it "the vapors with spleen."

The deacon's breakfast is ham and egg biscuits with hashbrowns and coffee. There are 12 deacons serving under Rev Bob. The oldest is Talmadge Stinson. He is also 67 years old. He went to high school with Rev Bill. Rev Bill was a bully.

When Rev Bill enters the fellowship room, toting his dubious burlap sack and his Scofield Bible, a forgotten fit of pique rises in Deacon Talmadge. "How is it, Sporty?" he asks. Rev Bill was called Sporty in high school. He has not been called by that name for at least 50 years.

Around this very day and date, about 50 years ago, during gym class, our Sporty saw Talmadge sitting alone. He rifled a basketball from across the gym.

It hit Talmadge squarely on the forehead and knocked him out.

Talmadge went out for basketball for the first time that year. He felt compelled to do so. He evidenced great skill. During practice, all through its staccato of balls bouncing and nets swishing, Tal experienced a mild agitation amenable to exertion. When practice ended Tal felt a sort of ecstasy. At games he felt the same emotions. At the end of his last high school game, he felt as if a mild and wonderful electric current were flowing through his body.

Rev Bill sets the now silent sack on the table space before him. He takes a chair among the eating deacons. The tide always comes back. He emerges from his fugue and correctly discerns what is coming down. Bucephalus begins to hiss and rattle in a mild, and for Bill, settling way.

The tide ebbs again. Rev Bill unties the cord on the sack, plunges in his hand and brings out the snake. He holds it at face level and begins to speak in tongues. The 12 deacons and Rev Bobby stampede for the double doors. They hit them in mass, bunch and tangle and burst through.

Talmadge believes that this is just the same old Sporty, hazing everyone around him. Rev Bobby stands now in the parking lot, next to his lately repaired Hummer. His mind is amazingly clear. He exists just now without thought. He takes out his keys. Thought returns. He and all 12 deacons pile in and make for the parsonage.

The tide returns. Rev Billy J does a hasty retreat, snake in tow. Within the next month, Rev Bobby and every deacon will surreptitiously go to the serpent house at the local zoo. Their hearts will be strangely warmed after they view many venomous snakes and leave without incident. They will each develop a more-than-passing interest in herpetology. As is his custom, Talmadge will also continue going to the YMCA and getting his fix in very zealous basketball games.

A Willing Suspension of Disbelief

Do do that voodoo that you do so well.

–Cole Porter

John Galen Holliday MD once said to Wanda:

“There need never be any overarching system of values. No ultimate rules.” For John, it is all sex and recreation, or any pleasurable behavior, and the stimulation of the brain’s dopamine pathways. If need be, invalidate truth and start over. The human hedonic animal.

At his clinic, it is totally feigned concern.

Results and profit are his only ends.

At the FOP shooting range this morning, he begins to fire 50 rounds of Speer Lawman ammo, 115 grain, TMJ, on his Sig Saur 9mm pistol. He stands at the firing line, the first of 6 strangers, all with concealed carry permits and no criminal history.

An errant thought sets him back.

It prompts him to turn to his right and commence firing.

Doc has had the thought before but he did not let it register.

He has many stray thoughts that he gives no attention, usually.

The realization sends a frisson of panic up through his back and chest.

He begins to lightly perspire. He feels an almost immediate coolness.

His hands take up an ambient quiver. An old traffic light on the range turns red and signals all to cease firing. He smokes. A couple of shooters walk out to replace their targets.

Driving back from the range last week, Doc was at an intersection.

To his left was a car full of teens. There was heavy metal music. The subwoofers vibrated reality. Doc very consciously wanted to get out and unload his pistol amidst them.

(There is no cessation, here. There is only pause, a break, an extended glitch.)

A biker type guy on the far end has been firing a rifle with a scope.

He walks out a few yards and adjusts what looks like a miniature goalpost

on a stand. He has been shooting through this.

Doc thinks it somehow measures velocity.

He believes there are no good or bad people.

He believes errant behavior results from ignorance or unfortunate genetics. Sociobiology informs him. DNA manipulation or mind-level education is the only thing needful in errant people. He has never logically played this out.

Or this:

Ted Bundy followed the dictates of his heart.

The Hutus killed 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda following the dictates of their hearts. 140 million women alive now have suffered female genital mutilation by people following their hearts.

(In the soulless modern combine, gears turn and actions are performed. There is reaping, threshing and winnowing without thought, mentation. In the latest machines, intricate and tedious robotic design has replaced the need for any human input.)

Watch me act.

Doc knows he will come to these moments when everything becomes strange, thought, perception, apperception, existing in the body – locked out, total alienation from everything, from stream of consciousness, being in time and space or eternity. He has various self-comforting techniques.

The traffic light turns green.

A cog, a vital piece of the machine.

A terrible comeuppance.

The light turns green. Everyone fires away.

Shotguns boom on a nearby range. Hidden by a grove of Ash trees, fully automatic weapons also fire.

Inside of things. Keepers of rimfire esoterica, husbandmen of death, of quick and effective dispatch, quick and effective severing of nerve tracts, popping of arteries.

At Nuremberg, the Nazi boys had families, wives and children.

They were inevitably sane. It was only orders, following orders. *(Doc's heart is like a big garden. He plants various crops*

*of needful vegetables and fruits. Flowers bloom there.
These must all be tended, cultivated. There are pests to be mitigated.
There are various pollinators to be encouraged.
Sunlight is necessary.
Water.)*

Last week, Doc drove over to Mamoo.
Eight year old Doris Zott died in a terrible car crash.
Doc prayed at her grave for peace of mind and surcease
from depression, for Doris to petition God about this. Doris in Heaven,
not Purgatory.

When Doc was a child, Jim Crow was an institution.
To see and hear and feel a group of people devalued like that,
dehumanized on a grand scale – this rots the soul;
it makes life surreal, unreal, a thing of regrets.

Common humanness.

*(I swear this really happened. I was teaching in Taquemines Parrish
in 1988. I went fishing with a couple of coaches and a parent named Sal.
They reminisced about times past. Sal said: "I liked old Judge Peri.
If you killed a [n-word] the judge would ask 'Where is it, now?'
about the location of the body.")*

In the heads of all the shooters shooting at human silhouettes,
human life is still valueless under certain situations, sudden situations
of trespass, (regrets?) no regrets. Identifying is the job; doing is part
of the greater enterprise. Individual life is not valuable all the time.
There is a risk of life. Them and us. A stadium full of people avidly watching a game,
psyched for a game, lost in a game, in a group. "We have more past than future."
Every good story accomplishes a willing suspension of disbelief.

See Sharon Run

Jism Jim's controlling metaphor is martial.

When his nephew was charged with misdemeanor possession of marijuana, Jim "sent in the troops." Every morning he "suits up, gets his rifle and heads into the jungle."

Trudi loved Jism Jim. She is over that, now. Trudi is also known as Ben. Ben is a young architect. His own high-rise apartment overlooks the Storyteller fountain.

Everything means too much to Ben.

Why did Sharon need to travel-oscillate-move to the equatorial latitudes? And look for a defining grace-moment found in the satorial faces of island people, there? Buddha never mentioned this. Just one life-changing moment to talk about. In the islands. All the rest of her life. Satori.

I failed Rich. No one could have had a better friend. I did not appreciate this. It frightened me. I was afraid of it. Rich died in addiction. He went back out and stayed out for 5 or so years. I can still hear his voice. I tried to die in addiction, but it would not happen. I am 3 or so years clean and sober this time. I have never been so happy. I am serious. No irony. Yes.

Rich's controlling metaphor was existential, a razor's-edge sort of thing. He would greet the dawn in the morning, the "edge of light."

Buddha's controlling metaphor was "desire." And eons of karma to work out. "Life is desire."

My anti-god was given to me at birth. A terrible being who feeds on evil deeds done to those made in the image of God.

"You are not a true believer, brother. I detect equivocation. We must believe in happenstance, especially after the coffee and ham-and-egg biscuit. I will watch you closely for guile."

I had a full-blooded bird dog named Happy. As a teenager. He was a machine. He pointed robins and quail for me in the backyard. I never taught him to do so. Genes. One morning, I found him dead behind the heat pump. A congenital heart thing.

Satori is a Japanese Buddhist word for awakening, seeing into one's real nature.

My best friend was a gay recovering alcoholic named Rich. He said:

"This is the way I have always been. Same sex attraction. It was never a choice."

I spent 14 years
with a bumbling shrink who would write me scripts for Xanax.

"Blind Bartemaeus stood on the road," sings the Canaan Trio.
Bartemaeus' controlling metaphor was gambling.
His daily alms gathering was "a roll of the dice."
He lost his sight later in life. He could yet feel the faces
of the cubes.

I would not be dissuaded.
"Jesus, son of David," I called.

Sharon moved to Jamaica on 12/12/12. She began drinking, again.
It made her shameless in attitude and speech. She knocked on her neighbors'
grass huts in the early a.m. and cadged for bourbon. She agreed to do certain things
on the clay. She died in her kitchen on or about Christmas. A couple of weeks in
paradise
is all that is ever granted an addict/alcoholic. Her controlling metaphor
was early elementary school readers. She always said of her constant peregrinations
that she was "having fun with Dick and Jane."

I am 56. I am a recovering addict/alcoholic. I loved Sharon who
could not stop running. If it is a substance that will favorably alter my mood,
I am powerless over it. I am Bleen Borg from Mars.

The monster made a request
of Victor Frankenstein. He wanted a woman and perhaps offspring. (*God did not
leave Adam alone.*) Evil also seeks to multiply its disease; an inherent proclivity
in all existing things: will.

This was denied the monster,
so he decided to "glut the maw of death" with the blood of Victor's friends. Such pique,
and yet we all understand this sentiment.

Giants

The battle is the Lord's.

-Samuel

It's the feeling of dread, not
in the bottom of the stomach but
in the mind. A rapacious sucking wound
letting light slip away if I don't quickly stop it,
escape.

I remember the *Phantom of the Opera* with
Lon Chaney. I have a pneumatic theory of anger.
I read my poetry wearing a different yet essential mask.
Like at Mardi Gras. Now, I have an old G volume encyclopedia
to work through. In fits and starts in my leather recliner.

Jan has battled schizophrenia since she was 19.

The ghost of Darwin came to me again this morning.
In my breakfast nook. He lamented reading Thomas Malthus
and not becoming a clergyman.

A disfigured man who falls in love with a beautiful opera singer.
One million revelers on Canal Street and in the Quarter and along
St Charles Avenue.

Our Thomas was the kept boy of the British East India Company.
He justified the starvation and plague death of the inhabitants
of those colonial lands. (*Yes, they are humans, but their emotions
are primitive. And they may or may not have souls.*)

Most of the revelers on that day are somewhere near the middle class.
Few speak French. Few are Catholic. If I go, I will probably drink.
Many of our movie stars and pop singers are said by some to be
mind-control slaves.

How is Western Medicine without anesthesia?
Strong-hands. Straps. A bullet to chew. Ask the one-armed
Confederate soldier on a pedestal down by the courthouse.

Galilei, Galileo.

He posited a heliocentric universe.

In a closed system, pressure will need an escape.

On my way back to school, on a 2 lane highway,
I stopped in a service station in a small Georgia town. We had about
twenty hits of yellow speed. And an ounce of pot. My friend
suffered from a crippling hangover. I had to pee.

This was in the summer of 1974. Freak flag.

A deputy sheriff sat with the 2 pump jockeys.

Unblinking. Nobody moved. I walked around to the men's room.

My entire life turned quietly on that pivot where bad things
might or might not happen.

Jan gets off her meds and it's on.

She becomes shamanic, a foot in this world and
a foot in spirit. She is the calm in the storm
of nefarious conspiracies.

We have this ability; it is best explained by particle physics.

It is the power of our minds to shape reality.

I have attended many Mardi Gras. This year
I will go to Mass instead. And get ashes
on Wednesday.

Saint Patrick converted the Irish. There are no snakes
there, either. Jesus became guilty of a lot of stuff.

A mirror in front of a mirror. Or.

He thinks that I think that he thinks....

Grant, Ulysses S.

Sherman cut a 50 mile wide swath from Atlanta to Savannah.
My Grandmama called this a "skirmish." In hushed
and reverential tones.

Euphoria. It all comes down to the razor of dopamine.

Too much, too little, need more?

There is a statue of Brer Rabbit on the square in Eatonton.

He is about 5 feet tall. He wears a red jacket. He sports a pipe.

His face is leering, weirdly animal. My father lifted me up a few feet
or so and I put my finger in the bowl of his pipe.

At my present age, I have begun to consider the increasing
nearness of Judgement. Does abstract art reveal the subconscious mind?
The maelstrom there? Is it all bad weather? Turbulence, eros, thanatos?
What of joy, peace, agape?

The kitschy Japanese movies about sea monsters.
And Hollywood's *Phantom of the Opera*. *Frankenstein*. *The Wolfman*.
As a child these frightened me terribly. At least
until I discovered Superman. Strange visitor.

I wanted to feel if there was fire, there. Just checking to see
if he might be real. I had seen that leer
on human faces.

Gethsemane, Garden of.
2,000 year old olive trees there when Christ sweated blood.
Have I ever really met my wife? No matter what
she has a most-pure heart.

Gath, Goliath of.
How did David know he could defeat him?
Before thousands of frightened Israelite warriors?
Nine feet tall? A spear shaft like a weaver's beam?

The little shepherd took the giant's head for a trophy.
There is a right moment at a right time.

My father lifted me up. I put my finger
in the cornucopia bowl of the monster rabbit's pipe.

The Interstate doesn't go anywhere near Eatonton.
On my canopied patio, I have several books. One
is a true story of a schizophrenic mathematician who
eventually wins a Nobel Prize. He has a sort of
gradual remission of his mental illness as
he ages, a reasoned rejection of its content,
an insight.

And I wanted to see
Uncle Remus. I wanted him to tell me stories

about enchanted animals.

I still do.

Where does my mind dwell?

I don't believe it will cease when my body dies.

Jan hears the voice of God like I hear a radio.

John Nash did his prize-winning math as a grad student.

And he persevered.

The 20 hits of yellow speed were in a jar in the trunk.

The pot was in the glove compartment. I did what I always do,

what I always have done. I acted like I was on a normal errand

on a normal day. I used the restroom. I spoke to the 2 pump jockeys

and the deputy sheriff. I got in my car

and drove away.

Just Life

Johnny takes the cardboard backing off my washing machine.
This breakdown is an egregious occurrence. I often pray
for my washing machine. Where is God in this?

Death is not scary. It's the pain that comes before it.
As a child, I knew that God often slept, missing things.

Billy calls Johnny who puts Billy on speaker phone.
"This washing machine leaks major water," says Johnny.

Billy spoke to me for the first time, yesterday.
He told me to pour a bottle of rubbing alcohol into my gas tank.
To get the water out. I did and my car runs smoothly, again.

On Johnny's phone, in the laundry room,
we can tell Billy has been drinking. However,
he yet knows everything about anything with a motor.

Johnny explains the problem.
Billy slurs, "It's the plump motrrrrr,"

Last week, at his repair shop, Billy was eating a fried chicken dinner.
Johnny and I walked in. Billy told Ed, his partner, "I can taste
power steering fluid. I think I forgot to wash my hands."

When Billy drinks he gets into trouble.
He has lately been set free from the county prison.
He violated parole in some arcane way.
He is still unsure of what he did wrong.

Billy says, "That washer is wassshhhtt uhhp."
We begin to gather our tools.
Billy again, "Just like that old cahrrr he got."

Billy has worked on my latest car with
nary a word to me. We stand around the motor.
Billy mumbles. Johnny translates. God
brought me that car for the near exact amount
I had in my savings. It is a very good car.

"I've grahdiiiiiated, again," he says.

Billy calls prison "the academy."

No one cares about him just now.

We slide the washer back to the wall.

I found myself in a cabin above the Arctic Circle
sleeping on a pile of musk ox hides. A dead and partially skinned
caribou hung from a rafter. A pile of frozen whitefish was stacked
like cordwood outside my door in the snow. I had been living there
for the past 6 or so years. Some part of me surfaced, briefly,
and found the situation had no real meaning.
No evidence of it. Nothing. Just life.

The Martians with the big black eyes locate me,
anywhere. They actually come from the Orion Nebula. And
are often everywhere I go, at night. Sleep. At night,
my home often resembles a carnival funhouse.

I found myself on the 3rd hole of the Cloister Golf Links.
My ball rested atop an immaculate stretch of Bermuda grass.
Truly marvelous. I was almost to the 150 yard marker.
My drive was a few yards shy of 300. I wore expensive shorts
and a pink Izod. I was evenly tanned. My watch was a Rolex.
I played this course twice a week. I had been doing this for a little over
3 years. Some part of me surfaced, briefly, and found
the situation had no real meaning. No evidence
of it. Nothing. Just life.

Johnny signs off with Billy.
Everyone else seems to have a firm, basic place
to return to, inhabit, in time. I have chaos,
there. When alone, I must distract myself with a book,
or music or TV. Or music.

Alien husbandmen of souls.
They appear to be adepts of the subconscious mind.

I crave aloneness.
Surely my wife and Billy and Johnny belong together
by some inviolable bond made in the stars.

Life on the tundra is different. Bears and wolves
try to eat you. They consider you to be food.
Straight up.

Billy lived for years in Virginia Beach, Virginia.
He still studies Edgar Cayce readings.

Life on the well-groomed Bermuda is different.
You have to at least act like it is important.
Johnny thinks Edgar Cayce is in hell.

Craziness come by honestly.
Who can fault a lunatic with no underlying organic defect?
I go back to my notes. I am sure the grizzly
that almost ate me was real. I am sure said Bermuda grass
was most immaculate. The Rolex was real.

Years. A year on Mars is not like a year on Earth.
If I had lived all my years on Mercury....

Earth people have this thing about water and fecundity.
I use a mythology. It has touch points, grounding techniques.
I am convinced my cats have a perfect knowledge of God
such that doubt is not possible with them.

Stardust

"... the memory of love's refrain."

Clematis threads throughout this place; the junk yard
of old cars lays out like a tattered quilt put down
over acres of hill and dale.

We are looking for a brake line for my '82 Thunderbird.
All those former years have mostly been crushed. They are gone.
Johnny and Billy fan the gnats away with face towels.
I didn't think of this. There is a rumor of earlier models,
of engines in pristine condition.
Why am I here?

Billy thinks we may hit upon a line we can "adapt."
I pay a dollar for us to get in. A tinny radio
hangs on a nearby fence. It is on a classic rock
station in Tampa. A Caterpillar belches
distant exhaust and diesel gutturals
in another yard across the two lane.

This is the place of scrap.
This is the place of salvage.
There is yet profit here.

Remembering, rites of passage...
it's all about the developing of the soul. The soul
is the clothing for the spirit. The spirit
goes beyond the death of the body.

The exquisite flowers of the clematis vine.

Do we have to know we are in purgatory
to be in purgatory?

At 16 years, I saw all of life through a distorted lens; it
was my only reality, everything.

I have never hunted down a part like this.
Johnny's father was mechanically inclined, as was Billy's.

I am not. I never stood around a car motor with my father.
He paid a good mechanic.

Clematis threads its way into this place. Clematis holds it together.
Flowers all through this yard, a winding and anchoring. Plastics, fiberglass,
shatter-proof glass and chrome do not rust. The damage here is mostly
from wrecks. The generative tragedy. How many people bled out
on the highway in these cars? How many broken necks? How many
had their first glimpse of that light
everyone talks about? Died.

Smith's Salvage Yard is abhorrent to the assembly-line assemblers.
Such a place. An anti-Detroit. Billy sees the value in salvage, profit
from ruin. This is an instinctual thing. 3rd millennial southeast
of the U.S. tool-user stuff. (I am beginning
to doubt my humanity.)

I give up. I walk back to the entrance.

Drive-in movies are lost in time, now,
a thing of the past. A place where children might be conceived
in cars. (There is no orientation, here. No direction.)

I lost my virginity in a car, a 1969 Chevy Impala.
I was 16. We were at the Dixie Drive In. My first
real girlfriend. This was a moral ripple, the beginning
of a current that took up in the pond.
Years.

I always had beer and pot.
I still have the disease of addiction.
I am yet Margaret Sanger's "imbecile."
I bought the "prophylactics" at a nearby drugstore.
I had to ask the druggist for them.
"Wet or dry?" he replied. And so on.

"And now my consolation is in the stardust of a song."

My favorite 8 track then was by the Allman Brothers.
The car had a stereo system I bought at Kmart and installed.
Most of the sex I had, then, was in that car.

What is the benefit of romance, that love,
when it is broken even beyond salvage? The dust of any star
is surely too far off. God put them in the night sky
to tantalize me. (I pressured her. Everyone
knew of certain doctors and nurses.)

I have retreated to a canopied picnic table.
Near my feet, ants swarm a crust of bread.
The radio skips and pops. It carries a favorite song
from my teens. All of this is happening because I suddenly believe
the world is about to end. Impending disaster limns my every image.
Soon, Johnny and Billy return without a brake line.
They have been discussing fathers' and car stuff,
no doubt. They have bonded on a deeper level.

Clematis threads its way, here. Softening the wreckage.
I know every love is transient, except for God's love.
Obsolescence. Nothing can last, function always, here,
in this place of yesterday's ruin, in the aftermath of calamity.

Orator

It doesn't mean a thing
and yet he does it every day and that
embues it with meaning; it makes it
take on meaning; he wears it.
And so on.

He points to an eye and pouts when he
sees something distressing. This is for him.
Only.

He calls himself Pliny the Younger.
He is in the Botanical Gardens, this morning.
He holds an open ridge hand in the vicinity of his right ear.
He vibrates it, a fine petite movement meaning
"I love daylilys."

On the hill of daylilies and hydrangea
he is in rapture. Hand signs. He is not concerned
with communicating anything to anyone else.
His red American Flyer bicycle with saddle baskets
is parked among the motorcycles. His mother
understands about 25% of what he is doing
at any given time. This came through close and surreptitious
watching as he grew. He has nightmares
concerning volcanoes.

Seated among the roses, now, he is thrilled by honey bees.
He smiles, dusts the nearby bench with his right hand fingertips
and shuffles his feet.

There is a stream of stuff always moving between his ears.
It seeks release. His poetry is in this gentle stampede.
He spends his days culling it out.

Anubis was a funerary god with a jackal's head.

On a bench among the roses, now, minor Pliny rests.
He is among the Mr Lincolns. Among their heavenly perfume.
Nothing is lost on him. There is a mild tension upon his hips and thighs.

His pulse quickens. He has broached the Holy of Holies, the very place where God physically lives, God with an attitude.

Our Pliny's precise being is a communication. A young couple drifts past. He joins his hands as if in prayer and lays them on his chest.

Pliny is a certified "tracker" of people and some animals.

Last week, he read from half a footprint in the red clay and knew that it was made by a man weighing 207 or so pounds who was slightly constipated and carrying a wad of snuff

in his mouth and a tin of it in his right pants pocket and a pack of cheap cigarettes somewhere on his person.

He can distill the essence of a whole day down to a few well-made handpasses, a concise summation.

Adept. Inner Sanctum dweller. For many of his years, he was godless, not even a hint of the spirit realm at all.

He is 33 years old.

He rests securely in the place between will and action, that space separating his day down to thought and deed, deep thought and the doing.

Pliny the code man is magnificent, unassuming, excellent.

Anubis haunted the edges of cemeteries.

Ghoul. Mal vivant. Jackal god. Consequential to death.

Poopee Lambremant died in the Spring of 1998. Pliny the Younger went to the funeral. There was weeping and lamenting of loss.

The musicians turned it up on the way out, on the path between the graves.

He is unafraid, now, of his own mortality; the Jazz band on foot at the funeral accomplished this for him. Pliny was tone deaf. Musically compromised. Song meant nothing to him until that day when it was added in. At some moments, now, he is a symphony, even a stirring thing of worship.

Creed

In a bar called Betty's Pickle Wig Factory, on the cusp of Eastlake and Roebuck, the 4 or 5 men and Betty herself sip distilled spirits mixed with various flavored beverages or tap water and ice or no ice or straight-up and unmitigated.

It is about 10:00 a.m. in the greater Central time zone. Betty tends bar. She tolerates little to no discord from and among the patrons. She wears a tan eye-patch on her left eye. It is rumored that she was caught "sleeping" with a married man. A fight ensued between the usurped woman and the usurping woman. And so on.

No one really knows why Betty has only one functional eye. Just a few moments ago, she told a lackluster patron, "You are now cutoff. Leave!" She does this every day, somewhat arbitrarily, with different unfortunates. A patron goes around 10:00 am. One-eyed Betty keeps a blackjack, several cans of pepper spray, and a 9mm pistol with a chambered round. She also takes the occasional shot of bourbon in a sleight-of-hand manner.

"I haven't been kicked out this month," whispers Eldridge Stutz, CEO of Eldridge Stutz Plumbing Company, an outfit of 5 plumbers, always on call. At least once before noon, he will remark, "This is as good as it gets."

Betty is a retired high school Home Ec teacher. She taught for 25 years at a behaviorally challenged school situated miles away in a behaviorally challenged part of town. On the first day of each school year, she tossed a student, any student, out of her classroom's spacious second floor window. Very little effort was exerted in classroom discipline for the remainder of the year.

Swami Brahamanda enters the lounge, sporting a neon chartreuse turban. He needs directions. One-eyed Betty adjusts her patch. "Yes sir," she commands. "What'll it be?"

"I am Swami Brahamanda. I was hoping you could direct me to the Golden Temple." This is a contentious place of worship only lately a member of the neighborhood. "You'll need to buy a drink if you come in here," commands Betty. He orders black coffee.

Our Swami brims with ethereal energy. He is in a zone.

The others can feel it even at a nascent 1.2 blood alcohol level. It is the energy of well-being.

Betty and the 4 or 5 patrons present this a.m. are expanding.

The milk of human kindness is 90 proof this morning.

“Keep on up the parkway. It’ll be on your right, Bramahonda,” says Eldridge.

One-eyed Betty changes the big screen TV to the Country Love Channel.

Bubba, the Swamp Rat, Sweeney croons about lost love, dog death, and revenuers.

His star is rising. Betty thinks Brahamanda resembles Charley Pride.

A swamp rat is a creature called a “nutria.”

Cigarette smoke, Betty’s perfume, the presence of several cheap brands of aftershave, the hint of a pine cleaner, and the vapors from several distilled beverages infuse the air of Betty’s Pickle Wig Factory.

Brahamanda accepts a cheap cigar from Eldridge.

A nutria is a big, semi-aquatic rodent.

The 4 or 5 men and Betty zoom to higher dimensions on ethyl-alcohol-mediated dopamine surges

and our Swami’s ethereal energy. They group around Swami B who is having a great time.

He no longer cares about directions. A distilled spirit of ecumenism imbues our 4 or 5 players.

“Sum it up, Swami. What’s the lowdown on the get down?” asks Eldridge.

“Be here now,” says Swami.

Silence grows; awe quickens.

“I’ve never thought... about that,” whispers Eldridge. “That’s so simple.”

“Do not return to the past. Do not hope in the future,” Swami extols. “Live now.”

A fly on the wall would be bored with this.

The east facing front door opens. Mel, the postman, enters in a brilliant aura of sunshine.

One-eyed Betty shades her good eye.

“Howdy, Mel,” says Betty. “How’s it going?”

“If it got any better it would be illegal.” chuckles Mel.

He leaves a stack of mail with Betty and turns and starts back out.

Mel Pauses. “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” he asks.

There are oohs and ahhs all around. This comment seems scripted. And then,

“If a tree falls in the forest and there is nothing with ears to hear it, does it make a sound?” asks One-eyed Betty. There are more oohs and ahhs. “If you meet the Buddha on the road, nuke that sucker,” adds Eldridge.

The door closes behind Mel.
The marvelous mystery steam seeps quietly into the bar.
A greater reality impinges in the common now.
Each person feels a lightening of heart, a certain peculiar peace.
The very baseboards might radiate light. Eldridge sets everyone up with a drink and a pickled pig’s foot. Swami will have another coffee.

The machinery of fate blesses anonymously this fine morning.
This spiritual badinage, this repartee describes the heart’s increase.
God smiles on us most clearly in people and circumstance.
We are never good enough for this. A profligacy of grace is abundant evidence of the soul’s progress.

The Soul of the Via Crucis

Moving into acres upon acres, in the green symphony of photosynthesis, the Hispanic men are out in the pepper fields. The heat index today is 102. Three flatbed trailers piled high with wooden stakes are the focal point, now. The men put out sticks and strings for the young pepper plants which capture something essential from sunlight. A boy on a four-wheeler pulling a trailer ferries the sticks out to the men.

Labor. From the age of 15, I tried very hard to burn something out of me, shock something out of me-- cannabis shock, alcohol shock, nicotine shock, caffeine shock, LSD shock, mescaline shock, opiate shock, benzodiazepine shock, experience shock, up the voltage somehow shock....

Most of the Hispanic men go to the Spanish mass at my church. The English mass is earlier. There are vacant seats during the quiet English mass. The lively crowd at the Spanish mass overflows into the front yard of the church. Over this abides a very real Mary of Guadalupe, the woman clothed with the sun.

In 1978, I opened up to a shrink who was a friend of my father. The good doctor told me I was seriously schizophrenic and psychotically depressed. He put me in a private hospital. He pumped me full of anti-psychotic meds. I told him this was not right. He told me every morning for a month that I was morbidly insane and the proof was that I could not see it myself. He gave me shock treatments. I made lots of ashtrays and belts. I watched Superman reruns every morning. I learned the intro, "Strange visitor from another planet...."

The Hispanic men receive minimum wage in cash. For many of them this is a temporary job. They move up the socioeconomic ladder. Farm labor is immeasurably better than any work they can get in their home countries.

In the private psychiatric hospital, the soul of the machine revealed its nature. I became dutifully compliant. I played a mentally ill young man. My doctor tortured me in intimate ways at the interface of culpability and sanity and life and humanity.

I know what it is like to be subject to a proprietary will.

He told me to go to trade school and learn to be someone there.
Today, I have a master's degree. I am a non-dues-paying member of Mensa.
I have never experienced any psychotic symptoms.

I am 60 years old. In the fields around our small southwest Georgia town, Janice and I watch the combines work a cotton field as it goes from buds on plants to giant white loaves of cotton.
We watch similar machines take down a cornfield. There is nothing romantic in this. It is business, profit.

Until the internal combustion engine came along,
horses and mules and oxen provided the power. Before the Civil War,
this industry was built and conducted on the lives of slaves. After that,
sharecroppers had the dubious tenure.

As a child, I saw pickers inching their sacks along the cotton rows.
From a distance, this labor transpired with an insect's niggling insistence.

In a combine, there is reaping, threshing and winnowing. What goes in becomes a commodity.
Reality's machines gobble and swallow and render beings made in the image of God.
This is an incredibly consistent process done with alacrity to the most of us and especially
to the least of us.

At work, the Hispanic laborers wear straw hats and no shirts.
When I see them in town, their very clothing is a celebration.
They walk happily, with parents and wives and children.

The ecstatic mystery steam emerges along the borders of things.
It gathers into itself normal reality and transforms common events.
Whatever is real on both sides commingles, and even in our living rooms,
if we become sensitive to it, we are aware of the ingress, the herald,
the existence of a higher and more basic dimension. Joy.

Very seldom, now, does life just happen to me. I participate, positively.
I am no longer at the mercy of triggering events. Memory is contiguous.
In my earliest years, my learning bypassed association
in order to process overwhelming events.

I have lived with death as my only hope,
praying for God to take me. Cockroaches in my kitchen

showed more will to live. Even animals seek to die--whales, dogs, ducks, pea aphids.

The via crucis, the way of the cross, winds through the streets of Jerusalem.
From the Roman garrison to Golgotha, thousands walk it each year.
There is a point where mother Mary and Jesus came face to face.
Jesus took upon himself all the sorrows and pains of the world. This is the essence
of the Incarnation. I can unite my sorrows to his.

“Oh happy fault.”

I carry a cross. You carry a cross. He, she, it carries a cross.
I was 22 years old in 1978. At 34, I began to remember what oppressed me.
On some days this is still heavy, and I start to want to want to die again.
On most days I carry not even the common burden, in my expansive now.
I have begun to see that joy underlies everything, everything.
I have begun to feel this, often.

Melanin Theory

To be human is to be black.

--Wade Nobles

Mose' brother Aaron is a black supremacist.

Hear him in the Waffle Shop this morning:

"White people have lower amounts of melanin than black people," he cautions.

"That's why we are better than you are at sports and intellectual stuff."

Hear Mose:

"When we get to heaven, we – all of creation – will stand around and sing to Jesus in a glorious thanksgiving 'git down."

Octavius Othello Cheetham is a DO, an osteopathic physician.

He is a dirigible of a man. He is from Fiji.

He is very black. His skin is awash in eumelanin.

His substantia nigra teems with neuromelanin,

or so he thinks.

Mose is elderly; he is a former AME pastor who became a Catholic deacon.

He is an influential friend of Doc Holliday's, Doc who has recently become Catholic.

This morning Doc Cheetham DO is at table with John Galen Holliday MD.

They have just finished a very large breakfast on a local restaurant's patio.

We have permission to hear them speak:

"Black people have markedly lower levels of Parkinsonism," says Doc Cheetham.

"There is no correlation between eumelanin and neuromelanin," says Doc Holliday.

"White people invented crack cocaine," says Doc Cheetham.

"I don't know much about that," says Doc Holliday.

They smoke, or

both men seed the nearby air with nicotine-laden lung-shaped clouds.

Doc Holliday sends a nimbus in the direction of a table of young women.

A bit of breeze moves that way.

(At the end of Doc Holliday's addictions, the lining of his stomach was eroded by gastritis; his meals consisted of a glass of heavy cream laced with 2 raw eggs and 1 juiced banana.)

"People with low levels of melanin behave barbarically," says the big man.

'We all have the same human heart,'" says his earnest companion.

Seeing his exhaled smoke in the company of the pretty women,
our poet of storm and stress remembers the "Spanish fly" myth of his youth.
He was also advised, then, that cigarette ashes in a girl's Coke increased libido.

*(The scene changes to a primordial swamp; this is both Docs' controlling metaphor,
a basic part of their worldview. Our medical time travelers talk shop with
a, perhaps orangutan-like, creature who is their ten-to-the-whatever power
direct ancestor.)*

Doc Cheetham calls Doc Holliday a "white infidel."
Doc Holliday grew up in Jim Crow Georgia. His mind floods
with racist rejoinders that he heard as a child. As a child
back then, the worst insult he used was "spaz."

*(For my second grade pictures, I sat on a stool in front of a big camera.
The photographer tried to make me smile. I had recent knowledge
of my 'season in hell.' Hopeless, how hopeless was the world.)*

Leander, a legless vet, scoots up to the table.
No one says anything. Both Docs slip a 20 dollar bill into his shirt pocket.
No one says anything. Leander's upper body rests a few inches off the concrete.
His eyes are level with the table top. He travels on a board with roller skate wheels
under it.
He spins and scoots off. He propels himself with a worn nub of 2 by 4 in each hand.

Doc Holliday avoided the Vietnam War draft by going to college.
There was no domino-theory-war involving the government of
Doc Cheetham's Fiji islands. There was no 60's countercultural revolution there.
PTSD was pretty-much not found there. Neither was rampant drug use and abuse.
No one there had read Kerouac, either, or known who Timothy Leary was.

Both Doc's are products of a most impressive education.

*(On the altar of close-by St Pachomius Catholic Church,
in a chalice, molecules of the blood of Christ break free of the liquid state,
becoming a gas and evaporating and seeding the universe with grace.)*
Think on this. Pause. Selah.

Margaret Mead came to the Fijis when Octavious was a lad.
She was a well-known cultural anthropologist. She saw no swarthy primitives
copulating in the cane breaks. The women had pre-menstrual discomforts.

The family structure was sound. She left immediately and never told anyone about this.

(Pluto's Gate is in Hieropolis, on the western plains, the gateway to the underworld. The cave emits foul vapors. Phillip, one of the 12, preached there. They nailed him upside down to a tree, nails through his heels, he who had seen the risen Jesus.)

"Why do you put up with me?" asks Doc Cheetham.

As a child, Doc Holliday had the "benefit" of the Ku Klux Klan as an arbiter of morals. They were terrorists. They murdered and tortured a truckload of people, black and white. Doc's uncle, Willard Cluvver, a white chiropractor, was beaten soundly because he let his black maid chasten his toddler son. Our hooded cousins were the thought police for a racist zeitgeist.

"I don't 'put up' with you, brother," says Doc Holliday.

Hear Mose:

"It is the Church Jesus Christ founded on the rock of Peter."

Doc and Doc smoke.

(In my dream last night, I rode a winged horse; early this morning I found it tethered to a tree in my garden. Later this morning, my dogs and I waited in a stand beside a dirt patch laden with chicken feed. We had good decoys out there. Flocks of the birds flew over, cackling, but none landed.)

Doc Cheetham is no friendly and flowing savage, anymore. He did his higher-ed thing in Sydney, Australia. He became an osteopath there. He encountered prejudice concerning his skin color. He picked up the ways of western civilization.

"Why did you leave the reproductive health field? asks Doc Cheetham.

"I have come to believe that abortion as a means of contraception is murder," says Doc Holliday.

"Before birth, no one can say for sure when the soul enters," says Doc Cheetham.

"This is all specious reasoning," says Doc Holliday, "like the melanin theory,"

"You would say that," sighs Doc Cheetham. "You would say that."

"If left alone, most of the time the zygote becomes a live human," says Doc Holliday.

A breeze from the distant gulf freshens the air around these two.

A crow lands on a nearby rail and says "Hello." His name is Billy D.

Doc's and Doc's brains monitor their full stomachs and signal for satiety.
"Margaret Sanger's whole tamale was to stop the reproduction
of 'the human undergrowth.' Eugenics," says Doc Holliday.

Mose again:
"Out of Zion's hill salvation comes."

Doc Cheetham fidgets and twists in his seat. He barks a shin on an iron table leg.
Doc Holliday fidgets and twists sympathetically and also barks a shin.

"A fetus feels pain," says Doc Holliday.
"It's primitive," says Doc Cheetham, "and its death cancels everything out."
"What if it doesn't?" asks Doc Holliday. "What if it has an eternal soul?"
"Conjecture," says Doc Cheetham.

Doc and Doc burn brightly this morning.
These are brilliant moments for them. They count on this.
Each man's heart, brimming with love, joy, anger, hatred is
a personal kingdom where God seeks to dwell amidst errant desires.
Each man carries the very real possibility of perfection.
Each man already knows everything. This is not conscious knowledge.
Each man knows quite well that even the brightest filament will eventually burn out.
Today, this is not conscious knowledge, either.

James Dickey Goes to Heaven

The Southern gentlemen, so grateful, sit around the stove in St Michael's Quick Stop.
"If you all don't do right, I'm going to have to send you back to a lower level," cautions
the archangel.

These guys are a lively group. No one can dip or smoke or chew, anymore.
They've gone over every inch of shelf and drawer looking for Jim Beam or Evan
Williams.

Pete demonstrates a new turkey call.
Some whittle. One feeds wood to the stove.
Reverend Bill Diamond rocks placidly next to his empty snake sack.
He has heard a rumor or two of Eastern Diamondbacks and even cobras.
Rev Bill wants poet James to go "snaking." St Michael puts the quietus on that,
however.

The swamps here have alligators.
James believes that redfish will follow shrimp into the brackish waters.
St Michael does not carry fishing tackle.

The men want bourbon and cigars, just now. Or strong coffee.
James, our erstwhile bard, is the newest sitter-around-of-stoves.
He asks the guys if they can all go and stand around the open hood of a car or
perhaps gather around and rest their elbows and stare
into the empty bed of a pickup truck.

St Michael, hoary and brilliant, settles into a cushioned Brumby rocker.
"Why would anyone want to be like God?" asks James.
"You had to have been there," sighs our archangel.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon gave the message at church this morning.
John Smyth led the singing. Just now MLK Jr chats with Medgar Evers
about martyrdom. "We only wanted the best world possible for our children," says
Medgar.

Rev Bill wants to know about poet James hunting trout with a compound bow.
James wants to know if snakes are a sacrament in churches of Jesus Christ With Signs
Following.
Bill does not know what a sacrament is.
There are various odd rumors about the Beatific Vision.

St Michael had to put James Chaney out of the store, yesterday.
He called Rev Bill a "peckerwood." Bill had asked Martin
why he needed a PhD to preach a simple Gospel.
Grace abounds here. And so on.

None of these guys is averse to talk about women.
Joan of Arc's name comes up. They all saw the Ingrid Bergman movie.
"Wasn't she a morphodike?" asks Rev Bill.
"That's hermaphrodite," corrects James. I tried to see her when I first got in here,
but Sam Clemens had all the dances on her card. Know what I mean?"
"We don't go there down here," cautions the archangel.

These guys need a little more revision.
These guys need a bit more of an ambient strange Southern Baptist zen.
They will eventually emerge from this place steaming and sin free.
St Michael's Dry Goods Store is near the top of the seven story mountain.
This seventh terrace is for the purification of the spirits of those who exult.

"I thought cherubs were little fat babies," says Rev Bill.
"Seraphs are the strange birds," says James.
"Six wings and covered with eyes," adds Martin.
Someone puts another log in the stove.

Our fellows sit quietly now, pensive in the cleansing heat.
The last bits of concupiscence bake out, minor vestiges of sin, self—
there is a song, now, crystal and perfect; it is carried down on wings of joy;
our men drowse in a reverie of perfection, a final ecstatic coming of age.

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