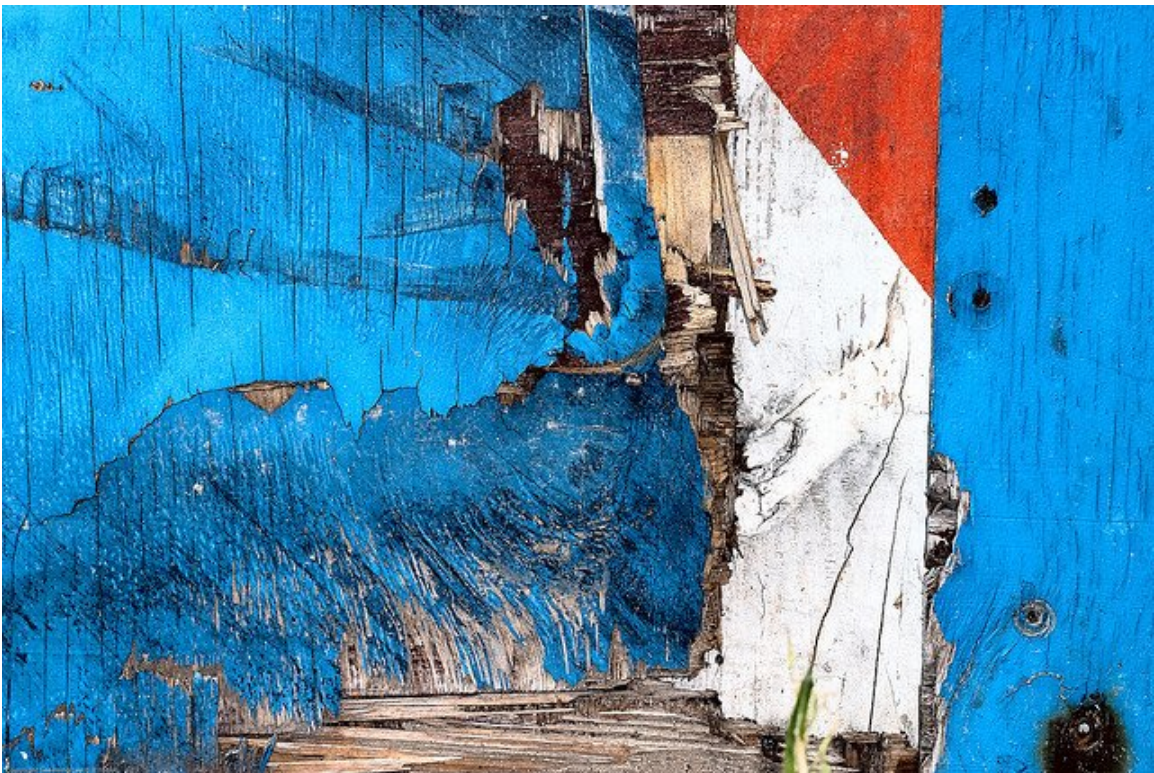


Too Long In Exile

A Poet's Journal 1997 - 98

"There is no deferment for the living "

- George Seferis



Thoughts on

Poetry | Place and Purpose

by David
Deubelbeiss

About the Author



I've lived around the world and tried to maintain my homeless mind and freedom to be.. A poet castaway. It's tough. Presently, a teacher in North Bay, Ontario and constantly digging myself out from reality. I'm a lover of red wine, good conversation and have an intense interest in the folly that is man, is us. There are no answers, only something to get you through the night.

About this book

This book was written during my second sojourn to the Czech Republic, 1997-98. A time where I tried to figure out and understand the words that wandered through me.

I'm still trying to figure that out. However, I think there is some wisdom in these daily entries from that time. The words came honestly and I let them be, as they were meant to be. It was a time where I was free and ran through the hills and forests of Karlovy Vary or loafed in a rich villa in Corsica. The world was my playground but I, the homeless mind that I am – still sought some place where I could stand and say who I was.

The entries surprise me, now writing this some 10 + years later. They still speak with an urgency of things we have yet figured out. Our desires run rampant. The earth is scarred and raped. Our purpose we are still far from attaining. We wander as ghosts, in a land that should be our home, a part of us, our testament.

I can't say much other than read and respond to my humble words in your own fashion. Like Picasso's so powerful words of "I don't seek, I find.", read these words of mine and digest and grow into what you truly are and will always be – a miracle.

Yes, life despite the suffering and misery is an opportunity and we are the miracle that must avail ourselves to it, the fleeting moments it offers.

David Deubelbeiss
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Canada

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- To my parent – for supporting me and understanding my need of exile and separation.
- To my third reader. Two I'll always find, it's the third that keeps me going.....

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**Develop interest in life as you see it, in people, things,
literature, music – the world is so rich,
simply throbbing with rich treasures,
beautiful souls and interesting people.
FORGET YOURSELF.
-- Henry Miller**

A Poet's Journal

-- to George Seferis, in honour of and against his acknowledgement of

“ the dreadful war nature wages to prevent the poet from existing. “

May 31, 1997

Why attempt an exercise of this sort? This is the question that throbs in the back of the brain stem before all writers begin any work. It begs the question, the bottomless question of existence and meaning itself. It presupposes the short yet so full question, “Why do anything?”. My only response is to say that this work will be an attempt to explain this question. An answer that is a question. In the tragic as opposed to the trivial profane (and I thank Koestler for the terminology) which all poets must murkily inhabit we find a world which doesn't offer up answers, a world free floating, with no up or down, no foothold except the feeling of aloneness which

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persists and squirms amid all the awareness of the trivial. A poet stands back from the trivial and "sees", interned in this other world he or she through voice and word attempts to answer the question of "why do anything ". In writing this quiet work of memory and observation I hope to do the same.

The journal or confessional form of writing can be said to be the true forerunner of modern literature. Once the writer sat outside himself and reflected what was true and authentic, the journal was born. I don't refer to the journal as historical anecdote or witness, a form of recounting what was done, where one wentNo, I refer to it as a work professing to reveal the inner life of a man, real or unreal, whatever those terms so sloppily refer to. It is a search for what is true, not what happened. What happened is only the backdrop, the carpet upon which the act of reflection and the examination of existence may occur.

In a fantastic sort of way, we can see the links between the rise of romantic love and the appearance of true confessional writing. Prior to the middle ages confessional writing was of a very philosophical or more so, religious nature. Augustine's Confession's though they offer profound insights into the motivation's of man, are by no means reflective of the inner turmoil and authenticity of a man.

Authenticity is the sentiment that truly swells the heart of modern man who sits outside himself, conscious, and who searches for some truth, some sentiment that may remain. When a man looks for authenticity , he is authentic, truth filled. It envelopes both act and form --- as too does belief, Pascal in his famous retort to Descartes so pointedly knew the truth when he said, " I believe, therefore I am ", an authentic declaration of man's situation, not unlike the truth in the words, credo ut intelligam (I believe so that I may know).. In my view it is all summed in the words, "Seek and you shall find". The authentic, be it a diary, a confession, a drunk

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screaming in the church, a nose blowing, tear eyed woman or a man before the rope all entail and have embedded the truth that in looking for an answer we are finding. You, you who read these words look and in doing so may find. I who write these words search too. In writing I find. Every lose brings forth something found to the wise man who can " see ". I lose the words as I write but in thought I find that ephemeral answer that flickers ever so briefly in front of me. This diary like a flame of love which seeks immersion in the other, seeks to immerse itself in the "otherness", the world beyond the trivial where resides both object and subject, absorbed into one. A surrealist attempt to transcend the falseness of life. This is my sentence. These are the prison doors I open to you in these few honest observations. "Seek and you shall find, for what good does it a man to have the whole world only to lose his soul." In the authentic words of a journal, the poet offers a view of a soul, the bare and authentic view that must always be behind the brazen, ever revolving everydayness. Come, turn the page it beckons, it begs.

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June 01

Sleep. This turning off of the machine into the unremembered never ceases to fascinate me. Fascinate in both a poetic and a scientific fashion. The last few weeks here in the Czech Republic have brought little sleep, a deep restlessness resulting from a skitty nervous energy. Change, big change as I'm undertaking always brings this type of response. It reminds me of Nietzsche's burst of creativity and insomnia, his vision of genius as but the man who fails to obey the dictates of inertia, routine, the go to bed at 11: 00 and awake at 7:00 no matter what the dictates of the heart, soul or head.

I've come to this small country, stuffed between yesterday and today, squeezed between the tyrants and victors that write history, this country so little known and acknowledged precisely because of this "little knowness". It is my effort to hide and collect my resources, my genius. Canada (and I'll have a lot more to say on this topic later) despite all its advantages, luxury, beauty -- just didn't have enough character, enough social memory, enough accumulated suffering for this so sensitive antenna to operate properly. I also needed to make a symbolic leap, greatness always lives by and through the power of sign and symbol, a leap into the full fledged faith and dedication of a writer, a thinker who is so only because there is something given that he or she must use, use to search for the "otherness".

So, here I am in a quiet little city, the once famous spa town of Karlovy Vary, Carlsbad as it is known to its German population. A lot of changes, thus a lot of restlessness. But the mind is alive and after all this is truly the only real country we populate. The mind awake always means a man in search of something. It is the anti-intelligence of the modern world which has rotted away and dispensed with purpose. Every day has become the same as the last, just a doing. Creation has no voice, thus the perilous and poverty stricken role of the poet amid today's busy, mindless automatons. Those who in not creating with their lives, who in not making meaning daily, live so happily, so unlively. I state from the outset here, it is not man's goal or nature to be happy. I repeat Breton's credo, " I want to sacrifice nothing to happiness." If happiness is only health and a poor memory ala Schopenhauer, I too want nothing of it, for life is only to be valued in the diversity of its feelings.... feeling only diverse upon the unrolling carpet of memory and experience. We are only here to remember, to reach that point where in remembering, we are forgetting and are still, quiet, one with existence.

But where, " where has the life gone that I have lived ? " Eliot, asks this too well, he

stirs the pot too thoroughly as always. Life is like sleep, I can find no difference. Where did yesterday go? Where did I go last night? It is all so strange in a way. What and where exist " ces parages / du vague / en quoi toute realite se / dissout", to throw out the question as did Mallarme, like a throw of the die. There isn't even the scientist's safe and near sighted cough medicine to explain away this dilemma. Yesterday, the coffee I brought to my lips, the kiss I kissed, the stubbing of my toe, the tennis game I played, the poem I spun in my head where are all these moments, things, that had such a unique existence but have now gone. Where have they gone, where does the centre hold? As Ben Franklin once quipped (and beware the intelligent man who comes out with a quick remark, it usually contains a most precious insight. One not readily apparent, as might a parable contain a truth), "Where is the memory when it is not being remembered?"

I don't like the explanation that all moments continue to exist, to be played out over and over again. This seems to me too easy, too tidy. Nietzsche's eternal recurrence is a catch all explanation, insightful yes, but I'm leery of all such ideas that profess to capture, interrogate, then publish the truth about time and space. Einstein's theory of relativity will one day be just a relic, like Egyptian hieroglyphics.

I fancy Isaac Bashevis Singer's view which he pondered in his delightful book Shosha, which in my present love lost days have just reread. He fashions an explanation for his simple love Shosha, who in her simple (and poetic, like a poet) way, just can't understand why things must change, can't understand what happens to what is lived. He explains to her that world history, time, the universe is a book that we can only read forward. We can never turn the pages backward. But everything that had ever been, still existed on those other pages. It continues,

Shosha caught her breath. " Will we live in No. 10?"

"Yes, Shoshele, on the other pages of the book we still live in No. 10"

"But different people have moved in."

"They live there on the open pages, not the closed ones."

"Mommy once said that before we moved, a tailor used to live there."

"The tailor lives there, too."

"Everyone together?"

"Each in another time."

Perhaps it is only my literary imagination that makes me feel that this is such a fine explanation. Existence is a book and we are the characters on her pages. In the beginning was the word. Mystery is only a wind that blows these pages forward and back. Madness, a man caught in this wind and lifted out of the book, aflutter. Sleep? Where we go to be created, where we enter the collective imagination. We don't remember so that we may fully exist on the pages that are created. Yes, there are so many worlds / words we know so little about. Without time (pages), everything would happen at once, as the old Hasidic saying goes.

Time to start the day. Everyday, I write the book. For the poet, the world is a different beast, a metaphor to be swum about in, discerned, tasted, loved, swallowed, eaten. And damn the trivialities, the tying of shoes, the brushing of teeth, shitting, talking about the weather, shopping! And in the end to be amazed at life's beauty, magic -- in wonder all poet's like I have asked above, "Hark, how is it that I am the beef I eat?". I am going out the door, leaving you another precious thought from Singer's cabalistic creativity.

" I believed that the aim of literature was to prevent time from vanishing. "

June 03, 1997

Morning and coffee. Two synonymous rituals that happen for me the world over, though the coffee part has been at times difficult. Coffee is my individual opium, the head deluding drink that makes the dream disappear and reality, routine begin. I wonder what Marx would have said if he had foreseen TV? Is it really an opiate or maybe of a different order, an unopiate, not another world or belief system but rather just a sterile and passive desert of human desire. Like Balzac, I lift one of my many cups of coffee to my mouth and summon a few soft thoughts.

Coffee, recalls a startling event which happened last week (and my how even the smallest things can be revelational and mind bending to a poet, like Wordsworth emptied and stunned by the beauty of a star as he turned his head). During my first few weeks here I was in a ghastly communist style "pension", a big panelak, a panel building filled with little room, snarly staff and drunk to the gills occupants. The hospody or pub being right beside didn't help matters. So, with my few hours of sleep and in a huff, I would sleepwalk every morning to the bus where unchemically adulterated I would bare the rollicking ride downtown where I would convaless in a nice (but expensive) cafe. As has always been my way, every morning I would grab a book off the shelf as morning reading. This morning it was my bible of human self delusion, **The Drowned and the Saved** by Primo Levi. I've read it over and over again and like any good book it transforms before me and continues to peel back the layers of human complexity (waste?). So, into the cafe I entered and sat at a nice large table. No sooner had my coffee arrived then in entered four typical German tourists, probably auto workers or steel fabricators. Big and round faced, not fat but almost, big bellied, short, squat and square. Smoking fat, cheap cigars and grunting in their to only them intelligible fashion. I pressed my

face into my Levi while they continued talking about every little kopek and cost with all the possible spark their grey matter could emit.

“ Enraged, other guards immediately came running: a prisoner, a Jewess, a woman, had dared defy them! They trampled her to death;

Sitting here reading I kept having the thought leap to my mind, how did I get here.?Then next, how did we get here? I had come here to Sudetenland, the Czech Republic for many reasons I had thought, namely, in the poet's way, for love but also, to write. Here at least I could hide away and be myself, be aware of my inner dictates. I had also come to be filled with a place that has “history” and memory. Canada is a good place to forget, I want to remember. But suddenly all these causes that I had reasoned were swept away, as if by Levi's own heart reaching insight, as if by the violent and surrealistic Picasso painting I was in, the true reason stood bold and fresh: that I was searching for answers about the Holocaust, about the one seminal event that has always haunted me and which now even as I write this, is sinking from the eyes of the world, even the “educated” world. Yes, this was the reason I was here, to feel and live this world.

I have personal and also poetic reasons for giving such importance to the holocaust. That I must state this fact is in itself a cause for concern. Looking into the eyes of these men, I could see that,

“ My task was to understand them. Not that handful of high-ranking culprits, but them, the people, those I had seen from close up, those from among whom the SS were recruited, and also those others, those who had believed, who not believing had kept silent, who did not have the frail courage to look into our eyes, throw us a piece of

bread, whisper a human word. I remember very well that time and that climate, and I believe I can judge those Germans without prejudice or anger. Almost all, but not all, had been deaf, blind, and dumb: a mass of "invalids" surrounding a core of ferocious beasts. Almost all, though not all, had been cowardly. And right here, as a breathe of fresh air

I excuse the length of the above quote but I want to make sure you the reader understand the complexity of my involvement with this topic, that for a poet, the question of Adorno, "there is no poetry after Auschwitz", the mystery of Celan and the heavy Seine waters that swept him away, how deep the well of the staircase Levi threw himself into, the questions of culpability are all still before us. Today, children learn about Bart Simpson in the classroom but not a word ever reaches their ears about the Lager, the Night. Our society has even transformed the lie of Auschwitz "Arbeit macht frei", work makes you free, into the national consciousness; off to work we go every morning, picking up our bags filled with the same air of a ghastly joke. I even know of a man who sports a forearm tattoo, a new fashion accessory. Please understand the depths from which I speak we need to understand.

These men beside me brought everything into focus, like it were that confluence of events that only us sensitive to them can touch, objective chance, where chance and destiny meet and the world as it is opens up. I can't describe it, all true meaningfulness rests forever in the soul of a man. But yet the task of the poet is to communicate, to bead a string between two unknowns, two lonelinesses.

The day before my visit to the cafe I had commented to my precious love that I didn't like going to the local swimming pool because of the great herd of German

admonished me, rightly, that people are people and that I was wrong to make such distinctions, that perhaps in my own heart And, she was so right, but yet as a man, the past haunts, what I see in the German soul picks. I can't ignore it, I am German in blood too and perhaps this is what turns me this way, unlike Nietzsche I can't pretend to be Polish. Yet too, I hear Nietzsche's timeless words ringing such truth even today. His madness in *Ecce Homo* was a madness of truth,

" All great crimes against culture for four centuries they have on their conscience. --

.....The German spirit for me is bad air: I breathe with difficulty near the by now distinctive uncleanliness *in psychologicis* which every word, every facial expression of a German betraysWhen I imagine a type of man that antagonizes all my instincts, it always turns into a GermanThe Germans ultimately have no feet at all, they have only legs. -- The Germans have no idea how vulgar they are.....My whole life is a demonstration *de rigueur* of these propositions. In vain do I seek among them for some sign of tact, of delicatessen in relation to me. From Jews, yes; never yet from Germans."

ECCE HOMO, A Case for Wagner

Well maybe now. But only maybe, time will tell if indeed there has been a "German miracle".

What is a man to do, I this "devil's bite". The German's even cursed me in name, the hallowest thing we all have. Yet, I will mock the vanities, like a true pipe playing David. I will find my Bathsheba and lay down in love at last. The questions of the Shoha will remain and I will do my part to spread the grain of truth it spoke. With

every survivor and with every aged torturer who dies, another like I will speak. Yet, I don't know if it will be enough. Nay, I know it won't be enough but still must be done. I hear the footsteps outside the cafe on Vitezna, "victory street", the hard boots on cobblestones, even now amid the jingle of these German's coins. I look into their eyes and for this moment at least, curse man with lips always in search of bread.

My coffee cup is empty. Now, the day awaits. I think I will go outside and wander the flowing Czech countryside, wander in thought and thanks, wander in search of some flowers for Hitler. Judge not or yea shall be judged, was this not spoken?

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June 04

I woke up this morning and remembered that this past weekend there was an election in Canada. That I've come so far, that I have no interest in this or any other "news", is something I have been chuckling over and patting myself on the back about all morning. All my life, even as a young toddler, totting around copies of World Press Review, I have been a "news" junkie. Sometimes three or four papers before lunch! But always in the back of my head was Thoreau's "once one knows the principles, there is no need for the particulars". I have now come to realise that and try to live what is in front of my face. In my fascination for "news" I was no better than the teary eyed housewife following the soaps. Yes, it is so wonderful to get up every morning and like Hegel be filled with the need to live, to find out what is "new" in the world. Yes, but what is "new" or the "news" (and now I will explain why I have highlighted these two words)? It isn't the worldly stage of diplomacy, coupes, movies star gossip, sports scores, elections that is the "new" -- the new, is

what is in front of you, it is a matter of aesthetic judgment. Real artists can see a world in the twisting, wrinkled contours of a stucco wall -- faces, shapes, shades appear and usher in a world solid and its own. Our fascination with being knowledgeable about the world or in knowing "what is going on, the "news"", is purely a wedged and strict way of seeing the world. We must learn to see again, I am happy today in the thought that yes, I'm learning to see again. In a strange way, no "news" is good news.

Canada, my home and native land. I would never have imagined the day when I would be so unconcerned about her, her political travails and movements. But politics and politicians seem to be the same the world over. "La plus ca change, la plus c'est la meme chose". Here, in the Czech Republic there is the same political environment as Canada, a dearth of ideas, the only idea being where the \$ should go, like little children shuffling lego blocks around. As in Canada, if one decent man comes along and enters the political arena he is corrupted and changed, swallowed into the belly of this whale (but unlike Jonah, never to be spat out and rage against Nineveh, only to drift silently into some high paying consultancy or law practice, there to write a boring memoir and testimonial to all they didn't do). The power corrupts, so too does the political culture. It is like the days of Rome, so much spinning of the wheels by Senators and publicans, still the people are thrown to the lions or given their bread and circuses.

Why? It seems that the corporate culture of business has inculcated some basic assumptions into us all and these assumptions we ask of our leaders, they blindly leading us. There are two basic commandments: 1) balance the books (but don't let me pay) 2) change everything without changing anything. Politicians then follow these dictates and if they do this successfully, they are reselected. The bread on the kitchen table is still the bread on the kitchen table. Good thing too.

So, I will continue to hide away and listen for the new which is never new, an ancient yet sturdy knowledge of our human condition. In learning this and building on this only, may I become something truly new.

“ What need of so much news from abroad, when all that concerns either life or death is all transacting and at work within us?

William Law, **Serious Call**

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June 05

The question of destiny and will rises up inside this morning. Could a man write on a slip of paper a declaration such as, “ I will score the winning goal in the F.A. cup final.” and then through sheer force of will realise it? Even if he were a crippled? The question of will seems to coat all other questions. I awoke this morning with the yet again nagging, dry mouthed feeling of still not jumping into the writing of the book, the book that I want to write through sheer force of will. “Genius is going against inertia” said Nietschze. Distraction, the great attractive black hole, another beer, going for a walk, making a list, watching TV, conspires to destroy the genius, the real person inside us.

But then what do we really have to do, what is really necessary? The world will still turn if I don't write this book, if I don't sit down and grind my thoughts against the cosmos' expediency. Most people never confront this question, it seems to take a certain type to see past the lights of “having to do” and into the shadow of “necessity”. I, as a poet think of this often. Perhaps that is why I take such solace and repose in literature. Life as opposed to literature has a hidden meaning, there is always a veil before our eyes. If I put this cup of coffee to my lips or not, what of it?

There will be an action nonetheless. If I shake a man's hand or hit him across the face as Stravogin proposed, so what? But in literature there is a closed and truthful universe, meaning is in every word and can be found. There is sense, order, process, a leading to. A character is filled with necessity, even Roquetin had to walk the streets, think -- and we the reader could understand this necessity, the act was with an aim, the story. But life alas (and for many good reasons too), has no evident symbolic structure, the meaning is well hidden, it awaits our living it as opposed to our thinking about it. This to me would seem what is necessary and why I hesitate to throw myself in the murky waters of "writing a book", a moving away from life to find more life. But then what about destiny? Is the will just a mirage? This is another question for another day, a question that no one has ever approached with an answer except in the incommunicable confines of their own soul, like Kirilov in **The Devil's**, did it happen because he willed it or was it willed because it was destined? These questions don't seem to be for us small, insignificant humans (insects, to use a Dostoevskian metaphor, seeing he is on my mind for some strange reason, this morning, intimately tied as he is to this topic). Better just to live. But then another question, How? The questions keep rolling on, endlessly. Best just to shut off the machine, we are not yet fully human, underdeveloped for the mental apparatus we possess. I repeat, I am turning off the machine.

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June 06

What is love? Or, what's love got to do with it, as that now infamous song questions? My answer, everything. Society's paradoxically, nothing.

I've come here to this wedged away republic filled with contradictions and

conspiracies, only for love. The love of another, I didn't find and is incomplete, the love of myself this too I must approach, but it is all for love nonetheless. Love, the always that coats everything. Love, the search for the time in the womb when desire and satisfaction were fused and one. Love, against the separation and aloneness the world of only existing offers. Love, the immersion in something base and common, a light even in darkness. Love, the fated feeling, a touching upon a realm where all is just as it should be and providence is enacted, where nothing wrong can be done because all has been fated, done as it is in love's name. Love, the end, the completion. Love the everything.

The modern world knows not love, love something illogical, fanatical and against the dictates of society, practicality, use and need. The poet, the lover both know this and search for a way to live both in this world and the world of love which beckons irresistibly. But alas, love knows no compromise, it throws off all from the tightrope either into its abyss or back upon the world of triviality and consummation with little things, the unreal we believe so real. I, this poet, search for love every moment anew, for love too destroys itself as all life does, destroys itself as it is, so it may continually be, be more.

Love knows no barriers, no separation, no rules. It is but one rule. I love a woman much younger than myself, but this is but the best love, a slap in the face of the common, a creation of a separate universe, free from the silly rules of society, the narrowing of life into choice, away from the solemn and powerful awareness of our fate. All true love is a road to ruin (witness our myths of love, the lovers suicide), for love gives us an understanding of the damnation apparent in this world, the conspiracy this life silently tries to imprison us with, a need to be what it wants and slowly coats us with. But love knows nothing of this and throws itself ahead into freedom, the knowing that there is no other choice than to do what is to be done, all

else dross, just living so one can love. In the light of love, all is good, even the murderer's knife or the lover's leap off the bridge. "Love, and do what one will", said Augustine. This is a phrase, six words that one should ponder a life long. Fathomless, like love itself, indefinable and thus untainted by man's time entrenched need of explanation, control, definition.

In a flash as I write this, I understand a question I've always been puzzled by. It is the question of desire, strictly, why do I desire young women? I am no Herbert Herbert as in *Lolita*, that great work of love, insight into real love (and one should read Lionel Trilling's essay on the book to learn more about this, for it is a book about love not lust) but yet, a woman 18 or 19, fresh to the world, alive with purpose is to me the apex of attractiveness, love. I know it is not just a physical desire; I've been loved by older, very beautiful women, yet would love a younger less attractive type much more. It seems, to be bluntly honest, that I find in young women the ability to truly love unconditionally, to experience a true unhinged love, opposed to the love we learn, through experience and society's dictates, steady truth serum. Love to me must be aching and genuine (in the real sense of the word, honest). A young woman offers her heart free of any "baggage", learnt behaviour. Adolescence is the time of love, as we enter the world of adults we learn to not love, but to ask for things, to place conditions on what we think we "love". I refuse to accept this. Maybe it is the poet in me, the adolescent, romantic and passionate that speaks. But let him speak I will regardless of what the world thinks. Love knows no practicalities. If we were free to truly love and choose, there would be no divorce, no "love" problems..... I enter the day with a heart filled with the love of my Beatrice. I'm looking for that young love to fling myself into the unknown with, who will unconditionally love, and not just love because of what is had or seen or done. Hopefully this love boat will never hit the shore.

June 08

Tourists. There is no greater absurdity than the notion of hordes of people travelling thousands of kilometres just to fill their faces with fast food and "to see something". This goes for whether it's the Eiffel Tower, the Shroud of Turin or just the bed where Hemingway slept. Why do hundreds of people gather around the Orloj (clock tower) in Stare Namesti, the old town square in Prague, looking on so feverishly, almost in a trance, waiting for the clock to strike the hour, then its back to buying their endless array of knickknacks, filling time? Standing and watching this carnival, this modern pilgrimage, I just had to keep shaking my head, "what folly is man!"

It seems that the tourist in the most gross and common sense has a deep need to participate in the ritual of another time, to commune with others who have seen and done the same things and in doing so join a special society, a society that in its secret knowledge lets time repeat itself over and over, like the clock they watch. When a person goes to Stonehenge, it usually isn't for the sake of "knowing", what these people know about prehistoric Britain is naught, but it is to say in that trite (yet so revealing) fashion, "been there, seen it, done it". It is the modern quest for absorption into the whole, so lost we are, so alone. Yet, even given this understanding I still find the whole process so perplexing, travelling (I prefer the term adventuring) I understand, but putting half your belongs into several suitcases, shuttling off in search of the same luxury and manner as you have at home, seeking out something famous to see, experience -- all this is a very complex and elaborate ritual, primitive and beyond my individualistic sensitivities. Tourists and crowds I try to stay away from.

I was reading Koestler's marvellous book **The Act of Creation** yesterday and he describes an experience which I think shows how we lie to ourselves, give ourselves false reasons for being tourists and then understanding not, keep repeating the process, planning the next trip, an endless eating of ourselves. Koestler writes that he had a friend who received as a present, a nice Picasso print which she hung in the hallway. A few months later by accident she found out it was authentic, the "Real McKoy". Then and there she went and audaciously hung it in the living room, in the most prominent location. "Why", Koestler asked, "has your opinion of its beauty changed?" "Not at all", was her reply, and she fervently kept believing that there was still no difference in how she viewed the painting, before or after. Only now she said, she was paying homage to the creator, Picasso. This bit of "self-trickery" shows how we don't even understand our motives, how we see what we see. It is like the tourists in Prague who clamour across Charles Bridge mouths aghast, wide open and who then walk across another of the same quality, unknowingly, weary, only thinking about getting back to the hotel and a hot "western style" bath. We all live such a fervent lie, a way of making meaning where nothing exists, this is life, for both the poet and the people.

I have always valued the sturdy and "down to earth" view of farmers and country folk. They portrait an attitude of profound simplicity towards things, a simplicity that reflects a quiet truth and honesty about what things are. As an example one might take the old farmer who in the shadow of the Matterhorn, daily takes his cows out to pasture. The tourists tell him, "Your so lucky to live here, such beauty, such magnificence!" He shrugs, sightly perplexed, and says "What that thing?", then continues along. He unlike the tourist, hasn't commercialised beauty, the "magnificent", confined it in the jar of a robotized mind. Beauty is everywhere, it is an attitude, not the thing itself.

Aesthetics is a muddy pool of water that any wise philosopher avoids and gives a wide berth. In the end, aesthetics is morality, a moral question. But not a question of how one lives, but how one sees.

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So much noise here in the heart of Europe! I am sitting outside in a little garden and dogs are barking (and just as an aside, so many dogs here!, my theory is that it is a left over response to Communism, to have a dog was a means of empowerment, when the individual had so little.), fires are crackling, screeching Trabants are coughing down the streets, babicky, old women are gabbing in loud voices, birds are singing their ever-songs, worker's are pounding away at the concrete of a building under reconstruction

Noise. I think that the reason that Canada and the U.S.A. have had such comparatively few wars, outbreaks of violence, is not as thought, a question of having so little "history", grudges. No, maybe it is only a question of peace and quiet in daily life. I'd like to look at other places in the world to see if this theory holds water (Rwanda, for example). Are we all just rats dreaming we are men? Malthus dreaming he is Lao Tze? Silence is everywhere, under everything -- ah, but like simplicity, the most difficult thing to find.

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I am nothing and everything. What is seen is but everything in between, in the netherland of life. "There is something hidden", as Ted Bundy's last words to his mother so perfectly put it. A life cannot account for even a moment of who I really

am. All poems are unfinished, but vain attempts to reveal the hidden. An effort but a futile one. Though, as hungry animals, we must live nonetheless -- as I once put it, live with tongues always in search of soup. This is what it means to be human.

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June 10

Music! Without it life would be a mistake. I just walked over to a friend's house this morning, sunny, hopeful summer weather in my eyes, then to my surprise as I rounded a corner, the sweet sounds of Schubert streaming out melodiously, full of strength and belief reaching out to my needy ears, bringing to mind that perfect phrase of Milton, the "sober certainty of waking bliss. ". Out of an old dilapidated, industrial building came these godly sounds of surprise, the contrast giving even more meaning to what they noted. Then, I was hit by another moment of confluence, that sensory ability given to some, a moment like when Wordsworth when asked "how" he writes poetry, what the inspiration was, said nothing, then looking up his eye catching a star, stated " I see something beautiful and I have to write". Or more to the point, he has written,

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light.

A moment where the world seems to stop and open, things stand explained, yet are unexplainable to others. Suddenly, around the same corner came a car, roaring, blaring the sounds of some rock group, the young man, flicking a cigarette

out the window, oblivious to any indication of the band's music. Then behind him another giant roar, the roar of progress and the modern, a big cement mixer, old and on it's last wheels yet still trying to make a few dollars. Then and there I had "insight", the Proustian moment of the dipping of the rusk, where memory and mind leap forward together and reveal a secret.

Can I even begin to try and explain what happened, what about the modern was revealed? It seems inconceivable, we stand within it, so mired in this mud that it would never make sense, I stand before the world like the seemingly crazed lady in the cattle car heading to Auschwitz shouting, screaming, "Fire, fire, I see fire! We will all be ash! Run, run!". I am not here criticising just modern music, I listen to it as avidly as the next person. What I am pointing to is an attitude, an eating of ourselves in our misunderstanding of time, our not ever stopping to "think " or more importantly to "be". Everybody always tells me that they have no time, here and more so in Canada. I tell them, all you have is time. The problem being they don't understand what is truly necessary. For me, a few notes like this morning, from an old almost fallen building, spreading joy and a sign of "just live' is what to me is really necessary. As we believe so we are. And too many are "the hollow men".
Skoda (Too bad).

What the poet takes as commonplace, the world only glimpses. The poet as the moment above illustrates, divines, "sees", moments where the reality behind all is revealed, there is a sense of what is true. The habit which we live our daily lives through, sleepwalking and not being, is shrugged off and something opens which the poet tries to communicate, however incomplete (as Valery has said, every poem is always abandoned). Most people live unaware of the hypnotic walk they slumber through life in, they mistake doing for living, they wait on true moments Odocilely unaware of the light which is there, the splendour that is for all who will

only sit and listen, not want. Essentially every poet is religious, whether he or she pretends or postures an “existentialist”, “nihilistic”, “ a I don’t give a damn”, or any other label. Religious for they search for that beyond the daily malaise, towards action, a stirring of the meaning in all things (as in Zen very specifically), or as in the Christ exhorted belief, of living all life in the light. A poet is truly, if he or she is a real poet (and how many false prophets, beautiful word smiths, despotic describers there are, who write without living.) is truly a person who philosophises with a hammer, breaking open the rust encased world we all huddle, scared and alone within.

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I have been travelling all over the world in search of “something”, a vaguely defined sense of self, of who I am. It seems that when I travel and live in other countries I become more sensitive to things and the world opens up, my own weaknesses outside the comfortable environment of home, the land I was indoctrinated in (and this isn’t too harsh a word in my mind) are revealed. A Zen like disorientation of the emotional and intellectual senses stirs a glimpse of what is usually hidden. Discomfort, juxtaposition, change seem to be the road to revelation..Or is it? Maybe I am really searching for ignorance, life a long process of understanding that we all stand so ignorant, a nothing before what is. Life a process of reduction not addition. We learn many things only to know that there is nothing to learn, as I remember Basho saying in his journal, his journey to the Deep North.

“ The further one travels, the less one knows. “

Lao Tzu

June 11

I have a theory that in a fundamental way I believe governs all acts, all of that which we label "living". It is that every action we do, brushing our teeth, getting dressed, driving aunt Daisy to the hospital, thinking about next year's trip are all done not in the name of the self, ourselves, but only for the rest of living things. It is a theory of abject, complete altruism. A slap in the face for modern psychology which can't see the forest for the trees. We cannot see that this is so, so wrapped up in the ego's illusion, the Maya of existence. Life is so unfathomable, so complex, having so many inter twinning relationships, so vast in its linking of chance and fate, so mysterious to each of us minuscule (but miraculous) "lives", that we cannot see that this is a fact. Everything we do is linked to the destiny, the necessity of others. For example, this morning I washed my socks. A small insignificant act, right? Well, maybe that having washed my socks, I used water, directed water that will one day reach an insignificant flower through some complex path of association. This flower will then grow and in beauty be picked by another who will give it in love to their love, shining the world with light and "willingness". In this way, the world turns, I have in but one of an almost infinite number of acts in a day, granted and have given life to others. We are blind and cannot see this "miraculousness", we are as bugs on the back of bugs on the back of god, blind to that which is higher.

Only a theory, like the butterfly effect. A butterfly flaps its wings and a storm occurs across the ocean in San Francisco. Fact or fiction? All cause is really a mystery, what we assume as cause, what the scientist says is fact, is but truth waiting to be declared false. All is unsure, unstable to us -- but at the same time known and directed, of value in another world. That we don't believe this and only see the carrot in front of our noses is a necessary thing for survival. But I believe in this other realm of causality, my own ignorance. Magic is everywhere, magic just my

awe at the unknown. In essence we live in ignorance, we live in two worlds, a world of act , rote, mirage and a world of meaning, being. May more of the later wedge its way up.

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June 13

Waiting, waiting, waiting. Here as anywhere in the “developed” world, people spend half their days in lines, in waiting rooms, trying to accomplish so many things we think are so important but which really aren’t. I have been blessed with a disposition that while waiting, I’m never bored. Impatience it seems to me is only a response to, a falling into boredom. Intelligent people are never bored and can always reach into the unfathomable depths of the mind for “entertainment”. No need of a sleep inducing TV, the deafening blare of a walk man or “a doing something”. Impatience doesn’t exist when a light is on above, when we refuse to live in the expectation of a future and instead, stir in the now.

While waiting I was flipping through a Czech newspaper trying to improve my still jittery Czech when my mind was stirred by a small news item. It seems that the Swedish Prime Minister, distressed over the fact that more than 30% of Swedish students between the ages of 12 and 18 had no knowledge of the holocaust, has personally promised that come the fall, all households with school children will receive educational materials concerning the holocaust. I applaud this act in this age of forgetting. Only in Sweden, a modern miracle. The Swedes seem to succeed where all other countries have failed, whether it be in their civility and peacefulness, their freedom of self expression and possibility (as seen in the fact that more than 50% of their members of parliament are women) or simply in their “modernity”. Hats off to them though I offer a cautionary note and hope that it is not

just because of their homogeneity, the relative unmixed population that these accomplishments are possible.

Percentage of Americans who believe that Joan of Arc is Noah's wife: 12%

(from Harper's Index, **Harper's Magazine** -- Feb. 97)

My own youth was one where I learnt all about the great battles of that war to end all wars after the war that ended all wars (if you follow me); the conferences, the Canadian sacrifices, but not one word about the most shattering event of the "modern" (and how it shattered the illusion (or did it?) of this word) age. Not one word. I was kept in ignorance I think not out of any intent, only out of others' ignorance. Canada and United States seem blessed with this ignorance of the past, history's ball and chain. But I have now come to agree that it is no blessing and in their infantile and undeveloped consciousness the world is a worse and more dangerous place (especially with the United States labelled, "World leader"). I must in the name of memory fight my countrymen's attitude of forgetting, of "the less known the better", of not confronting the fact of this horrendous and "word failing" event. I can say with a lot of confidence that this figure of 30% must be close to 60% or more in my home and native land, Canada. My hopes are that the Czech Republic look less to America and more to Sweden for a model and inspiration, a way to reach a semblance of Havel's dream of a civil society. The Czechs have a long way to go and it seems that like the rest of the world, they are going the American way, the way of a swaggering individualism, a society of money-hungry, a society where in such an "uneducated" way people are reeducated, the past falsified (and in regards to the communist years I see this process well developed, in only another generation, all will truly believe that it was the Russians who made them do what they did, their hearts were/are clear). Let us hope that memory stays alive, the memory of not just Lidice but also Terezin, the memory of

Jachymov and not just tanks on Wenceslas Square, the memory of Jan Palach and not just Dubcek.

“Those who do not remember the past remain as children.”

-Cicero (who was of course both a politician and a philosopher. A funny but honourable combination, like the Czech's beloved Jan Masaryk)

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June 16

Studying Czech, a language with all the complexities of a space shuttle, and like any language, the power too. I am continually fascinated by the process of language acquisition, how at one moment I know nothing and then out pops “le mot juste”. It is all a mystery, language that thing that makes man and questions both, a thing that reaches in and touches upon the very filament and light of existence, bare naked existence.

It never fails that all Czechs I first encounter unfailingly ask, “Czech is a difficult language to learn, isn't it?”. Invariably I reply, “urcite, of course”. I would like to begin a more elaborate, fuller explanation but my rudimentary Czech leaves me to reply with the above. My more complete explanation would touch upon the fact that all languages are very complex, there is no such thing as a “simple” language. The very phrase is an oxymoron. A great mystery to ethnologists and linguists alike is that when looking at ancient (and I hesitate in using that ridiculous term, primitive) cultures, they fail to find any such animal as a “beginner” or “starter” language. It is as if language developed not from the simple to the complex but all at once, full and

complete. Almost as if it was given to us whole.

Every country holds the belief that their language is precious and unique (and right they should, the minute we would believe otherwise we might call the language "dead" whatever the surface condition). I also think that most people think their language is "difficult", hard to learn. There is hidden in this belief, the origins of an ethnocentrism, an ethnocentrism at once both necessary and false, so complex is man himself, complex like language.

"Philosophy is language idling"

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

June 18

The "île de beauté", the island of Corsica beckons. I will be spending the summer there, forgetting a young love, finding new love, searching for something as yet unrevealed, hidden in the maquis, the solid wisdom of the Corsican mentality and the full enlivening smell of the air. I must consider myself fortunate to be able to spend three months a year there, amid good friends, real French bourgeois who know how to live, love, swim among the paradoxes of life. I say I am fortunate but at the same time I hesitate. I go to Corsica less as a choice and mostly because I have to, it is given. I need to seek out, find other people like myself, I need to experience another part of the world (the Mediterranean), to see how other people live, other people who aren't just the typical middle class, fast food, what will I acquire this week?, unliving, "uninspired", distracted types. This is the poet's vocation, Star Trek like, to go and seek out new lands (and I mean lands not just in the physical sense but also the spiritual sense). It is an exploration of the human soul, from all angles. But that said, I won't mind the change of cuisine -- ah!!, unlike the Slav's, the French understand the stomach, the base impulses of man. I go to understand this

impulse too.

Poets are always full of contradiction. It is the swinging between these extremes that makes the poet alight. He or she must seek out the world and find the places where the world lends "in sight", whether this be the gutter after a bout of drinking or the ball, dancing with a queen. A poet judges not the world through things, things are but a means to a higher order. I have always felt the need of the poor man, I grew up dirt poor and still feel that despair and necessity. But as a poet, I seek out the other rich side of life, to understand human motivation, the basic drives of man. I stand in contradiction, I have my shirts ironed by servants yet don't have a centime for a cappuchino. I fly to Corsica on my last few Czech crowns, only to go to dinner with people who travel the world, who fly more than they walk. But as a poet all this "filler" doesn't matter. It is just one way of being open to the world. If I had stayed in Canada, in that small, cozy little town, I'd have been so comfortable and cozy that living would have been impossible. Life does not entail happiness only more life, it is a yea saying in the face of suffering. Life then means to suffer and still rise and say, I do, I can, I will, fuck it. Comfort and happiness are two words I would like to strike from the English vocabulary. They are a road to ruin. They are a means of postponing living and not "being alive". But the world never learns, only some few souls through their suffering, keep the world turning and being anew.

" There are some incurable souls that are lost for society

So long as we shall have failed to remove any of the cause
of human despair, we shall have no right to try and remove
the means by which man attempts to free himself of despair
..... And I who share in your ailments, I ask you: who
would venture to stint us of our sedatives?

Antonin Artaud, **The Liquidation of Opium**

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Germans. Once again the topic returns to haunt (?). Today I watched closely, a group of Germans tromp around the town. I had witnessed the scene a thousand times before but all of a sudden I was hit by a certain symbol that I'd kept inside for so long and now just connected with. What symbol represents the German nation, mentality, ethos? The eagle? The swastika? No, the umbrella. Why the umbrella? Precisely because when touring, most nations do as they please. The Italians visit Paris and carouse about town oblivious to any orders, the French stretch out their legs in St. Petersburg without knowing what hour the tour will all gather back together again. But, but the Germans all gather before an upraised umbrella, one calls and the rest answer, there is only obedience, a basic organic and animalistic response to the most powerful, hidden in the German soul. As I've said, it is a nation, a people who in having given us through this same filter, Goethe, Rilke, Heine, Wagner, have given us the Eissenkommando, the heil Hitler and the forearm tattoo. Contradiction and reality. A reality we would do well to look straight at and reject.

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June 23

I'm sitting on a train softly passing through the green rolling countryside and red roofs of the Czech Republic into Germany, then Switzerland, Marseille, Corsica. The same tracks that once carried away so many to the killing fields of Aushwitz,

Treblinka time plays tricks on one who can see symbols everywhere, I hear the voices, the clanging of thirsty fists against the walls, the guttural shouts of the guards, the wailing of babies time it doesn't exist, we only play along with it because it is the only way we may bear the world, live in forgetfulness. We are all lost, blind

Sitting across from me are two normal Czech gentlemen. Picture them if you will, I will allow you the complete freedom of envisioning them. As I said they are ordinary. But ha! you can't picture them, you need a slight detail, something to go with, to organise, to proceed to stick mud to. Thus, in giving them existence, a uniqueness, in naming them, I the writer allow them to be ordinary and common. Thus, the common and normal must by-pass and go through the individual, otherwise you would have been able to "envision" them without my help. Here, I see the problem, the organic element of evil (and this differs greatly from what we generally think is evil, an evil act, for an act that is seemingly evil never is really so, it is just a temporary manifestation that we ignorantly give the "evil" label. What was evil at 7:00 yesterday is often sanity, saintliness at 10:00 the next). Human nature in its need to organise, to lump things together in its archetypical search for the other, dulls and destroys life and individuality. We are evil in the sense that we who are unable to come to terms with our own aloneness, take our bricklayer's hands and crush the baby, the uniqueness of others. One of the most basic notions of humanity is the notion of living only through the debasement of others. We see the world wrong, we don't see the other, we see the common and the normal, even when the facts say otherwise. We are all blind, all lost.

Across the aisle facing me is a young, overfed, too done up in all her insecurities German girl. She is reading "Bravo", just one of those millions of magazines the world over that cater to personality and gossip. It seems that all of humanity feeds

upon this knowledge, the gossip of the star, the well known -- it has replaced any genuine knowledge. The rise of the biography the last 30 years into a tell all form of melodrama, into not a way of showing the life of genius but rather that of the trite and well known is another dramatic example. It seems the books store shelves have grown to hold the lives of Archie, Lucille Ball and Brad Pitt while the memory of Pasteur, Shaw or Voltaire go the way of the dust bin. So many other lives worth learning from, full of genius, the ability to persist in folly, which the world never looks at, never touches. I've always wished I had the time to write the biography of Primo Barnsworth, the inventor of the television. An unknown genius who persevered, persevered in his folly into insignificance. A man eaten up by the powerful, by time, by an acronym -- RCA.

Just finished reading the introductory letter of Lowry, a response to his editor concerning **Under the Volcano**. A masterly, rambling piece of art in defence of artistic merit and self determination. I intend to tackle the volcano over the hot, contemplative days to come in Corsica. Tackle it and in the way of the Consul, produce some redemption out of my own mescal induced dreams. As Lowry so adroitly points toward in his letter, the words of Baudelaire, "the world is a forest of symbols", and I as an artist am lost, we are all lost but I know we are lost, I see the forest for the trees. The world has been sucked dry of the "symbolic" and in living a life of use, of dead objects, he lives in the day of the dead, among the dead, a life of work and a little relief and then finally before death the sudden question, "what have I done?", the sudden realisation of a waste of living without reaching out and making things significant, of living without giving. We would do well to heed my warning, or is it too late?

" We have succeed in rationalising the myths but not in
destroying them"

Now sitting across from me is an older German lady maybe 50, 55. She is studying English and has her books and pens all perfectly ordered in front of her. Me, I just finished studying Czech, my head too full lately to make any real lasting effort. Is this how the world is moving, toward a monolingualism, an English, coke drinking, world, super culture? I think it is going in the other direction, one that all the pundits and critiques in their eagerness to see so simply, simply missed. The world my own eyes, a few careful observations see, tell me that we are moving into a time of language renewal, growth. English is growing as a language of communication but not as a Language, as a mother tongue. In fact, English speakers as a first language are decreasing in numbers as the world adopts the cultural openness of their language while at the same time strengthening their own national tongue. The world is filling with those that are bilingual but I can't buy the argument that it is becoming more "English". Arabs or Japanese may learn English but at the same time their heads are firmly sculpted and led by the logic of their own mother tongues (just as they aren't becoming culturally more American or Western, they may drink the coke, but they drink it believing in a world far different from that which an American does when it crosses their lips on a hot day. They borrow the symbol but don't adopt it.). That we would think otherwise is only that particular form of cultural imperialism and optimism and bravado (all the same creatures) peculiar to the American psyche. Another fact often left unmentioned is that although many may speak English, it is far from an Englishman's English. It is a sort of base, guttural, situational lingo. English being such an open creature, so dynamic in its use that by so many others learning English, it is like setting a chimpanzee before a Steinway. Maybe we should come up with another word for this bedraggled, bony pidgin parading around as "I speak English". Only an idea.

I'm in the Munich BHF. A gigantic building. I look about and what do I see? A giant TV screen plugging Mercedes and the easy life. The whole world is becoming, being transformed into one big billboard. The worst is how our attention, our privacy is so blatantly broken into, encroached upon. Worse even still is how these cries in the dark pull at the eyes. I try not to look at this screen, yet my eyes can't resist and yield to its delights. Is this a physical phenomena? Is it that I'm a child of the TV generation, enculturated as a child I'm now addicted, unable to be free from that famous motto of the Tubes, "TV is king". My mother tells the story of how as a young child I would get up very early in the morning and many times they would come down the stairs to see their young, beatific child staring at a test pattern, waiting in a Buddhist like trance for the turning of the wheels of dharma, for the world to begin with the start of the program, The Wizard of OZ, cartoon version of course.

Going through my notes from a few years back that I wrote while reading George Steiner's , **In Bluebird's Castle**, I came upon the following which aptly sums up how I see the world as becoming so "responsive" and less free, responsive to the dictates of the global advertisers, script men, sloganeers, the blinking glare of the TV screen or computer monitor, the quiet scream of cultural obedience,

"Already a dominant portion of poetry, of religious thought, of art, has receded from personal immediacy into the keeping of the specialist. There it leads a kind of bizarre pseudo life, proliferating it's own inert environment of criticism, of editorial and textual exegesis (we read Eliot on Dante, not Dante), of narcissistic polemic never have the metalanguages of the custodians flourished more, or with more arrogant jargon, around the silence of live meaning."

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June 24

I am in Marseille. So chaotic, full of the passionate air of the Mediterranean, the mix of peoples and cultures, the clash of the ancient and modern, the whirl of living under the hot sun. Driving here is a real experience, especially for a "wide eyed and wide open " Canadian such as I am. Tight spaces, horns, no real rules of the road, parking is anywhere your car will fit, who rules is who honks or yells the loudest. I was almost lost in the chaos and confined sense of the city -- a mescal inspired dream born of the sweat and hopes of all those going about their business, tete a tete. I'm reminded of the fact that Marseille was the home of the Surrealist movement, Artaud's Theatre of the Absurd and Charles Craven's posings. A fitting place, a place where there is a sense of adventure, of possibility, of mix, where nothing is as it seems, all just veneer.

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June 25

Today I made my way to Corsica, a journey of the soul. One leaves a continent as if abandoning it, leaving all one's worries behind and having the head turned toward the island. Islands represent a chance that society may be redeemed, that on these little places man has another chance and stab at being who he or she really is. Islands are places that people don't travel to but rather pilgrimage to. Their is a religious element and a faith in their possibility. Islands are a womb where we can

return and find comfort, safety, meaning.

This is what Corsica seems to me. How many islands represented the same hopes (which are always fruitless, given man's basic "beingness", a need to destroy, to disravel, to rebel, all in the name of and for the sake of being human), Thomas More's Utopia, Atlantis (which fell into the sea), Lilliput, Gaugin's Tahiti, the Island of Doctor Moreau, Auden's Iceland, Castro's Cuba, my Corsica. All these represent man's need to seek an answer, to redeem himself and live anew, true.

June 26

Jacques Cousteau died yesterday, or as the newspapers so pompously declared, "he entered the world of silence", the world he gave us. The newspapers and TV stations were filled with accolades and praise, every detail and moment of "publicness" was drawn out, discussed, remembered. So much folly is man, we seem to love the memory of a person more than the person. When a great person is here, we don't follow out of the darkness into their light, living eats us up and we ignore them. The world seems to be filled with inertia. Celebrity, empty celebrity and then a runny nosed sentimentality. Humanity works in such a strange fashion, always cutting off its nose to spite its face, or as Dostoevsky once put it, man would sooner stick pins in himself than give up the freedom to do what isn't right. So strange, so sad, so what is.

" Let the dead bury the dead. "

" Destruam et oedificabo"

(" I shall destroy and I shall build. ")

- the words on Proudhon's headstone

I'm sitting on one of the terraces here looking out on the magnificent bay of Ajaccio, mountains ringing a bowl of light blue water, Ajaccio rising up the heights in the distance, the light angelic, divine, like that of a Brunel film. In the middle of the bay sits the Queen Elizabeth, behind her rises a plume of smoke. Am I witnessing another British invasion (for yes, they have been here before), the cannon balls flying, the hulk of a ship bringing panic to the city in siege? No. The roar of a jet hits my ears and brings back the late 20th century, it passing gently before my eyes, over the harbour and into the arms of a valley to the right where the airport is located. Yes, the screech of the modern. What is the fire? I don't know but very likely another "attentat", a bombing of some government building (the palais de Justice itself has had its doors blown off, the symbolism worth more than any damage done). But my imagination as always runs ahead of itself, I exaggerate, probably just a cigarette thrown out a window onto some dry maquis. Most likely, so cigarette ridden is this island and France itself. No western fitness and hamburger ethic here, just good, well timed indulgence, timing being everything.

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June 29

Yesterday evening (morning?) was spent watching one of America's great spectacles, the World Heavyweight Championships, Tyson vs Holyfield. As with every great American story there is the bad guy (Tyson) and the good guy (Holyfield), a great goal (\$30 million) and glitter (Las Vegas). Not to venture into the topic and absurdity behind two men trying to batter each other to a pulp while watched by half the globe, one thing did strike me as so comical and thus illuminating (for comedy is a moment of conversion, an opening, where hidden

metaphors sprout and are understood subconsciously). Holyfield won by disqualification, Tyson having twice tried to bite off his ear. All seem so repulsed by Tyson's actions, barbaric acts of the uncivilized (but is boxing a civilized act?), the crazed. Yet, this understood, I was more puzzled, more driven to laughter by the comments of Holyfield himself after the fight. He went on and on about Jesus and the Lord, how all was done in his name, for his glory. I couldn't but snicker, seeing the absurdity in this, an absurdity most others found nothing contradictory about -- religion having long ago been emptied of any imperative other than "believing what you believe", a self-hypnotism. It seems that Holyfield has yet to love his neighbour or the Lord with all his heart and soul, and too, he hasn't learned to turn the other cheek. I guess in these desperate times, where we are all searching for accolade, meaning in the eyes of others, we haven't learned to give up ourselves. That is the point and the tragedy of these two men, Tyson and Holyfield, a tragedy of self absorption, "beingness" abused and left unused. My last word? Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's (Caesar's Palace that is). Maybe Holyfield should try Buddhism, the dharma might help his left hook.

Tomorrow is the return of Hong Kong to the Chinese mainland (I hesitate to say communists because when the island was first leased it wasn't given by communists). A lot of speculation as to the future and what effects a communist government will have on the day to day operations of this great powerhouse of capitalist drive and money hunger. What seems of paramount concern is if Hong Kong will be open for business as usual, if money will still be there to be made. Not much discussion about personal liberties, the draconian police state that the communists can't but set upon Hong Kong, even given the assurances otherwise. It seems the new motto of capitalism, the new "mercantilism" and "laissez faire" mentality, is one of having selective moral judgments in regards to trade and business in general. When there isn't money to be made then one can be stern and

condemnatory toward the other government (ie. Iran, Libya, N. Korea) but where the dollar is to be got, the critical apparatus takes a holiday (ie. China, Singapore, Indonesia, Chile, Saudi Arabia).

Regarding Hong Kong and Asiatic countries in general, most people I've discussed the issue with, find no problem in justifying trade and business activities with these societies. Their justification is that these cultures are "different" and thus we cannot judge them through the lens of our own laws and rights. This begs the question, are there basic human rights, as the U.S. Declaration of Independence decries, rights self-evident and unalienable? I would say yes, it is something which we all feel and not something that can be rationally argued. We all feel this "righteousness", the sense of doing what is right in the face of our relations with our fellow men. To not act in this light, is to be blindly ignorant. The evils of all dictatorial and fascist governments are not the hardships they burden their people with (however great these may be), but the invisible and heavy chains they twist around their hearts. I can only see these chains being twisted tighter in the case of Hong Kong. People may still get richer and richer, Western banks too, may continue to fill with dollars but in the last analysis as the communists solidify control, the basic right to be free in however form they individually choose (as is the precious gift of America, a gift they themselves don't see the value of and which transcends all their own faults, forgives them) will be lost, the world will be that much sadder, 13 million people sadder. Men must make sacrifices in order to live together, I agree. But what cannot be sacrificed is the freedom to choose, as I earlier indicated in reference to Dostoevsky, man must be even free to stick pins in himself, this being the essential element of our humanity, however irrational it may seem on the surface. How many Hong Kongese will now be free to stick pins in themselves? Very few, though their tormentors will stick pins in many of them, in the interrogation rooms smelling of fresh paint bought by the blindness of the rest of the world, our thirst for dollars,

Hong Kong or American.

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July 02

The world can sometimes open and be so beautiful, so moving. But most often we sleep walk through it, wearing blinders we only see the carrot in front of our nose. It seems nothing helps, even should we stop and smell the roses, we miss the magnificence of the hummingbird, fluttering still over the begonias. Man is defined by limitation (sensory and cerebral and alot more) as much as anything else, this limitation is the reason for our strangeness, our cry for completion hidden in all our comings and goings, our folly hidden in act.

Sitting in the spacious, turtle shell whirlpool, massaged by a hundred pulsing jets of water, a pool at my feet, a magnificent view of mountains and sky in the distance, a beer in hand, Joe Cocker on the stereo, " I'm feeling all right" blaring positive vibrations -- all this, like a King I am, and finally I awoke and felt what a glorious life I lead, how beautiful it truly is here, how lucky I am as a poet to have this repose, "de reculer pour mieux sauter", to step back in order to jump farther.

Yet, the last week I've been feeling placid, bored. How much boredom there is in the world! We are so forgetful, what once was beauty dulls so fast. Is this perhaps why we were thrown out of Eden, not for having disobeyed or having eaten from the tree of knowledge (and wanting to be god like) but simply because we grew bored of the beauty, ungracious and lacking this primary quality, we were cast out to find it again, to always remember. Isn't this the point of evolution, where the mind develops in search of an everything, a never being bored, an activity unconstrained

by the poor senses which so quickly give in to boredom, becoming frozen amid the splendour, they our jailers? Who would be the bravest and write this history of boredom (and is this what Breton meant when he invoked the plea, " who will be our Christopher Columbus of forgetfulness "), so much of everything is done in its name; wars, drugs, making money, slapping a wife, holidaying, changing governments, changing our wardrobe, nail biting and singing in the car. Where is the necessary? As our century moves further into the embrace of the unnecessary, a luxury of not having to toll day and night for a morsel of bread or to keep alive, we are burdened with the weight of this colossal nothing, boredom. Is this the reason we kill each other, is it so simple? Were the 30,000 men a day who came back in body bags from Verdun mere victims of boredom? Is life so cheap in the face of this colossus -- boredom, ennui?

Purpose it seems is what we lack in this century, a lack of purpose which feeds boredom and lets our loneliness hunger alone. Colin Wilson in his usual insightful way (if I am correct and remember rightly) called it, St. Neot's Margin, the point where we all fall asleep but yet then can awake as soon as any little purpose is put before us. An extreme would be when we are almost killed by a speeding car, our death avoided only by a slip on the curb. Here, all becomes light, life opens and becomes purposeful, we glimpse its purpose momentarily. A less extreme but more insightful example is the power of the list. People make lists so as to remember, remain awake, have a purpose always in front of themselves. It gives them a something to point toward, a way of passing St. Neot's Margin. Wilson gives the example of one day hitchhiking and during a ride being gripped by boredom. He had no set schedule or need to arrive at a certain hour. But then there was a mechanical problem with the car -- both passengers were gripped in an intense observation of the speedometer as the car slowed, both wondering if they would make it to town. He was given purpose and immediately the boredom vanished,

vanished even though the purpose did not matter, he didn't need to arrive at all in any case. Yes, eccentrics, madmen and collectors are the happiest in their constant "purposefilledness", like a character of one of my books, a man who only wanted to paint coffee makers. Content in his preoccupation, a finding of purpose before work, work in this age which gives us no purpose, so detached from art and creativity it is. In sum, boredom is a problem of the mind, we must fool ourselves or be as fools.

" The whole of man's problems result from the fact that he cannot stay in a room alone with himself. "

Plato

" Now there are certain minds which one could compare to these invalids and which a kind of laziness or frivolity prevents from descending spontaneously into the deep regions of the self where the true life of the mind begins they live on the surface in a perpetual forgetfulness of themselves, in a kind of passivity which makes them the toy of all pleasures, diminishes them to the size of those who surround and agitate them.

Proust, **On Reading**

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June 07

Why this feeling every now and then of wanting to drink, to drink myself into a stupor, a Dionysion whirl of "not existing", destroying the self, getting away from

being, doing? The last few months have been dry of poems and welling up inside this need to disappear, to face down my life and challenge it to rear its destiny despite my attempts to fail, to disappear. It is always so. Periods of inspiration and a great sense of power and standing above the world of triviality, where poems pour out and consecrate myself and man, where poems allow me to touch the "other" that I feel I am and we all are. Then, bouts of depression, philosophical searching, a great defiant anger at the triviality of the world, of living, periods of diving into the deep well of drink and debauchery. Ah the stories I could tell if I could only remember them! A giant need to disappear, to destroy. Why? Am I recharging my poetic batteries, is it a real challenge to the world, a seeing to far and too deep, a pure dissatisfaction with the world. In truth all poets (true poets and I will speak to this in a moment) are not sure in their skin, they are outsiders, dissatisfied with the mundane the world offers. They search for completion through destruction, they slap at the face of civility (always though in their own particular way), they return to the original and eternal moment through their refusal to enter the arms of time, history, the march of humanity. They go before the paper defiant, prophetic, listening for the silence that tells and unveils all.

“ Because they are instantaneous and personal emblems,
all poems say the same thing. “

– Octavio Paz, **The Bow and the Lyre**

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June 14

France is such a land of paradox. A land where the church is still a power but has

no power. A land so modern yet ridden with archaic habits, etiquette. The paradox which is France seems to me to stem only from the fact that it is a land first and foremost built upon the reality of an "idea". Ideas coat the French consciousness and have a reality far beyond that of any other culture. Founded out of the hopes of the French Revolution, the ideas of this great emancipation, this fact still lingers today and wages a fight against McDonald's, the English language, laissez-fairism, social Dewinian "education". A fine example is the fascination the French have for game shows. Not the flashy stupid variety prevalent on the American screen, the Let's Make a Deal kind of thing. No, the intellectual variety, full of word games, knowledge. Not only are there many but they are watched. The same too with the newspapers here, a wide swath of ideas, argument, intellectual debate -- choice. Another example, conversation. Here, people still argue such arcane things as "is revolution still possible", "right vs left", "what is time", "how should a man live". Conversation is still an art of ideas and the mind, not trite pleasantries and an endless regurgitation of mundane events. I remember fondly an old Czech girlfriend who visited France with me and who at the end of the evening looked at me aghast, uncomprehendedly, saying, "How could you talk about food for 5 hours? How?" Yes, for the Czechs this would seem incredible but it really wasn't because of food that we boisterously blurted out our beliefs. It was due to the IDEA of food.

Today I read an interesting article by George Soros, that great shylock of contemporary times. Here, he turns face and rallies against the present state of uncontrolled free markets, no government intervention, ownership or control of the means of production. In effect, he was taking a truly French position. A thoughtful essay, just as right as all those on the other side, the right. Economics is the only science where so many experts are completely wrong, 99.9% of the time but no one questions their validity. We need these merchants of hope, these astrologers.

Without them, the whole economic house of cards might collapse. Don't throw rocks in glass houses.

But Soros himself, though so earnest, is only following the steps of so many others who having earned so much on the backs of the poor, then kindly turn the other cheek. Mitterand just greeted Castro with open arms, like they were two brothers. Mitterand always the softy for the idea of "revolution" like most French people. But I guess here we might say they eer on the side of hope, l'espoir. Practically speaking, we don't think of the pain of all revolutions, how it is just a scurrying for the pot of gold, ideas and hope just ways to detour and dodge the rest. I wonder if old Mitterand went with Castro on a little side trip to Switzerland to also check on his "hard" (but not hard earned) currency resting there waiting for retirement. I wonder, it makes us all wonder.

Last night, in celebration of revolutionary brotherhood and the fact that my hosts had both first met as youthful revolutionary volunteers in Cuba, I went out to a local restaurant with friends to a "Cuban night" out. A truly idealistic French affair, glorifying something with electric synthesizers, watered down moquitos and not a Cuban in sight. Maybe typically Corsican, how they hunger for the same success. All in all it was a ridiculous affair, a blending of a passion that isn't there. A little like the Corsican "to be" revolution.

But I've experienced worse. In Cuba this past New Years, I celebrated the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution at a hotel in Varadero, Cuba. Just having arrived off the plane, I wandered down to the bar where all sorts of revellers were belting back barrels of rum and blowing their horns. Unknown to them Cubans were huddled around their little piece of chicken and a few spoonfuls of rice outside the compound. Dreams of foreign currency dancing in their heads. It was a bad

dream, the pool, the buffoonery, the prostitutes, the luxury. Yes, there really wasn't anything to celebrate then as now. The only revolutions are those of the human heart, those that bow to no ideal except that which is our own. Most of our problems are caused by this false hope, a hope in a new leader, an emperor with new clothes, in a new economic plan, in a new woman or man, in a new year.....

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October 18

Noise, infernal noise! I've mentioned this before but it bears repeating: progress and it's loud watchdog noise, seem to rule over modern society. There is a necessity and a getting up and having to do that propels every man forward and into the day. But what is this "Progress"? The notion is both paradoxical and ironic. On one hand it was instilled in our forefathers, the pilgrims -- a need to work hard and make something of one's life (meaning, and here is the paradox might Bunyan say, to acquire things, achieve comfort of body and then maybe soul). On the other hand progress infers movement, change, a dynamic, something that detests stability. We in our modern minds then both embrace the notion of progress as meaning becoming secure, "comfortable" and also as meaning, becoming less comfortable, more full of life, a march onward into the unknown. Unfortunately, it is the former which seems to have the upper hand, the myth of Eden, the search for a garden of plenty drives us on and on, and so much wretchedness and evil trails in its path. And too, so much noise!

Progress can only be of the human heart. There is no other kind. This is the poet's true motto and declaration, his reaching beyond the "vanitas veritas" of life and into the heart of the matter. I think of old John Stuart Mill, that old flag bearer of

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“progressive thinking” who broke down when he realised in his heart that he truly didn't want to accomplish anything, see anything finished but merely wanted to act as if he did. He saw the falseness of himself and cracked up as a result. He failed to live in the light (as a Quaker might say), to look beyond the narrow margins of history and into the heart of the matter, the “humanness” that reigns at all times, regardless of time. He failed too, to embrace the silence that all so called “progress” rests upon. To live in the quietness of the heart, the truth.

“ What good does it do a man if he should win the whole world but lose his soul “

- Psalm ???? (something Shakespeare might have said)

Oh damn that saying, “ you can't stop progress“! What pessimism it reveals, revealing both that we detest progress but proceed down its path nonetheless. No wonder we are as slaves, slavery in the modern conception a freedom to be complacent, a not knowing that “ sometimes the jail bars on the window do not work”. We embrace the inevitability of progress both because we are indoctrinated in this way but mostly through our refusal to confront truth. At bottom, this all is just a man not seeing he is free, that he can struggle against his chains, that he can stop the noise of civilization. Yes, stop that noise!

What might a Bushman make of all the fuss and worship of “progress”? Would it mean two bits to him? What have the flowers and the trees or the old shack up the road got to do with progress? What has a poet to do with progress when he only wants to go nowhere, to stop the world and cry out a new creation? Poke my eyes out and be done with it!, I say. I have no use for a world where man in all his primitive “sensualism” deems what is necessary and useful and seeks to over run the rest. The only problem is where to run? There are even golf balls on moon. So

I'll have to slide into the mind, slide into the whole, the dream, the all, thought in all its manifest and sacred forms. This is a poetic duty, my own version of a Pilgrim's Progress.

" Noise proves nothing. Often a hen who has merely laid an egg cackles as if she laid an asteroid. "

Mark Twain

I came across this quote while sitting on the toilet and absent mindedly rummaging through all the books scattered across the floor. It is the sign of the thinker, the true poet of prophesy, to be always be blessed with apparent co-incidence. Ideas are nourished through the acts of daily life. Where another man would just walk by , the poet sees the world open up, the world aflame in a store window, or in the smile of a young child. Fate seems to lead him here and there, he possess " feeling " , a being in touch with life, the mysterious forces which make us do one thing and not another. So, I picked up this book that I put there absent mindedly many weeks ago, picked it up and opened it and then saw this quote to add. The mind of the thinker sees the connective tissue of events, the why things happen. Sees and then tastes. Metaphors, words arrive at the poet's door only through the power of this mind full ness. But not only words, a life can be written as well as a poem. The poet lives with this fatalism, this sensitivity to the direction of his life, always in front of him. What was is the precursor of what will be. Through this all is divined and created. Even the future is the past.

An interesting aside: the book that this quote was taken from is a 1945 edition of **5000 Quotations For All Occasions** . As a poet, I turned first to the section on suffering, suffering also from a wacking hangover. As I turned the pages my eyes fell upon the heading, "Sex". There to my surprise were only even bigger letters

spelling, "SEE LOVE". Yes, the times they have a changed.

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October 24

Concentration is to me as good a definition of the poet as anything. It seems that the modern world is becoming incapable of it, and why the poet is becoming so much of an anachronism. We can only concentrate in servitude, at work.

Conditioned thus, the vast majority of us have learnt how to tune out, to vegetate, to do anything but concentrate and exist only for the sake of existing, doing what you are doing. Alan Watts has rightly called our age not one of materialism but of "sensualism", a continual bombarding of the senses so we don't have to think, to be. Most people need noise, need the radio on, try to do three things at once, worship busyness while getting less and less done. This great need to be occupied is only our fear of concentrating, existing in life and not being half asleep while awake (and half awake when asleep).

Concentration is liberation. It is the freedom to be. The poet concentrates in that he is awake and sensitive to the world around him, an antenna that separates the wavelengths of "being". Like a car driver he lives relaxed but concentrated, aware of the road, of any knocks or rattles yet still able to think of other things, to get on with life. It is this level of concentration, his ability to be there and be elsewhere, to exist yet hear and converse with "the other" that makes a great poet. There is no such thing as a hurry, why hurry? Concentration means that one finds an infinite sum of life in any one thing, it is the anti-thesis of boredom. It values only what has been, not what is. Concentration is the poet in the chair thinking and feeling and interacting with life in a way so precious few know. The poet's concentration knows

no deferment. He gives all in its name and in return is rewarded with a poem, a useless thing that holds up the world. In touching the source of life, he gives us a way back to it through the poem. A way back only through the re-reading of the poem. A reading which must be done with concentration, a re-creation of the original conditions. A concentration so few seem capable of and why perhaps poetry as a written form is dying. Not dying in the sense there is less and less, no, there is more and more. Dying in the sense that poetry has become a means of self worship and not self celebration (selfibration). Too much flywheel and not enough sparkplug. The great poets can't be found because there are now not many readers with the level of concentration needed. Who could read Finnegans Wake, where is the perfect reader? No, poetry will never die at its source, the waters are fertile, abundant with life. But at it's reception as it comes out of the tap, people will lose their stomach for it. It is too bad in a sense, but this seems the path we are taking as we drive forward in the name of technological innovation. Having the time to concentrate, to live, we don't. This is truly the greatest paradox and the greatest shame. We run away from ourselves. Maybe this is why the current trend of modern art seems to be towards incompleteness, unfinishedness. Is it an attempt to woo this new creature who cannot concentrate, a bending to the demands of the market --- or is it just the opposite, a refusal to give an easy answer, allow easy response, something revolutionary on the part of art and artists given a world of people who refuse to see, to concentrate, to live? Which is it?

I offer up a candy to think and suck upon. Why the term "concentration camp" for the lager, the extermination camps, the killing fields of Nazism? Is there some deep meaning hidden in this use of language? A hint to their significance? I think it was Graham Greene who always refused to use the term and bend to obtuse and watered down language. He corrected anyone who did use it. His name?, murder camps. Precisely.

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October 24

I've been writing a novel lately and the thought keeps rising up, what is the difference between a novel and a poem? What is the difference beyond the form and arrangement, the tone and compression of the words? In essence the question is, what different things are each trying to tell us? Or is there a difference in what they try to do?

I think that there is a difference. I have turned to the novel for many reasons, like a school boy, to conquer something new, also to have more time to say something, find a different rhythm. But the basic reason is that I found that poems weren't coming, bubbling up. And of course, the poet must wait on them. He must sit at his desk or walk the streets with a million things in his head but nothing which for mysterious reasons beyond the reach of man, WON'T LET THEMSELVES BE WRITTEN DOWN. A poet requires tremendous concentration, effort and patience. He is a listener and not a "creator" per say. In a certain way he only repeats the same thing every time, but he must wait on it. Novel writing is much more modern and open to thought, our thought. Like a surrealist poem (which is the forerunner of the modern novel, taking the novel into poetry, forming the boundary as it does) the novel invites the author's directive hand. It moves slowly and can be directed. Words come and stream along. There is much more control on the part of the artist, the writer. When I sit down to write the novel there is a different feeling altogether from that of a poem. With the poem my skin bristles, my hair raises up, I am removed from the world to find another. With the novel I am calm and flow along, there is a slowness, a lack of expectation. I can get up and make some coffee,

wander back and put down a few more words and then brush my teeth. Not so with poetry, it is there or it isn't.

Obviously there are gradients to all this. There are as many different ways and mannerisms to writing as there are people who write/think. Perfectly, we await the novel as a poem, a Joycian mix, broth of metaphor and connection. A concentration of what it feels like to be human -- not just a telling of a story or a sounding, but a real and bottomless falling into humanity. Me, I await the poems that always spin and flash in my head to pop out. In the meantime I sit and call upon the words, stringing them together like moments in a life as I write the book.

Here is a thought to ponder on the differences I mentioned; Poetry speaks to a man, a novel speaks of a man. True and not true, as are all generalizations, all just yelping dogs at the heel of an ALWAYS.

“ My cheek blanches white while I write, I start at the scratch of my pen, my own brood of eagles devours me, fain would I unsay this audacity, but an iron- mailed hand clenches mine in a vise and prints down every letter in my spite. Fain would I hurl off this Dionysus that rides me

Melville, the novelist as poet, Letters.

November ??

It is a day in November. I only know it is November because of the unending heaviness, the dull greyness that covers all and is everywhere. It could be Dicken's London, 1834, fog and fumes. I wipe the grey coal dust seeping in through the windows. I know it is November, the fires have started, mankind huddles in their

tenements and shuffles back and forth to work to home in darkness and disease. I know it is November.

I've been trying not to wear a watch, to try and shrug off the habitualism and slavery which time, the knowing of exact time gives. But it is no use. As I am quickly finding out here, my little experiment in freedom is running into many roadblocks. I must be for it or against it, I can't fence sit. If I seek to dwell among other's I will fall for my patterned ways, my enculturated habits -- reading the papers, wearing the right clothes, shaving daily, spending so much time on "myself", endless small talk, anxiety over being a success, doing just for the sake of filling the hours. But I've come into exile to throw off this world of drudgery, pedestrianism. Yet, it is so hard just to live thriftily, to change oneself and be, just be. So hard, this paralysis every morning, especially when I know that the proper attitude to life is one of vitality, of doing, engaging existence head on, of filling the day with the power of a reaching, rampaging heart. Vital, alive in the smallness of doing, a Zorba the Greek, love of just being, should pull us towards the end of each day. But I driftI am scared, I admit it. My aim is to throw all into literature but I stand like a young boy on top of the diving board, before the edge, the void. My knees shake, I can't turn around for fear of falling, of failure -- I can't jump for fear of falling, fear of failure. Frozen like this I exist here in this little town that time is remembering, but frozen I don't exist. I know I must jump, but can I?

I have come here to experience the feeling of not having to be something or do something preconceived or necessary. I seek to abandon the conventions, habits and stiff roboticism which we mistake for "ourselves". To live in the "foul rag and bone shop of the heart". But this feeling of floating has been getting the most of me, drinking, carousing endlessly I just drift through things. Endless are the days of thinking, thinking, so much thinking, that there is paralysis. Words stream through

me and form a continuous poem but the moment the pen is at hand they die like microbes breathed out into the air of life. And the thinking leads to more drinking, hangovers, waking up on the street dew covered with faint memories of screaming at everyone on the bus. Slowly walking home until too tired, saying fuck it and lying down on mother earth.

But maybe the clouds are clearing. Maybe this was just the adjustment, the terrible few months in the lager camp until crusts of bread are cake not because we forgot what cake tastes like but only because we don't care anymore. Not pulling the tooth but bearing with it through the pain, until it is gone -- not because it isn't but because I cease to notice it. Maybe, I hope that now I may be able to dive off that diving board into the warm waters of who I really am.

I came across a quote which precisely states the feeling of desperation that I've been experiencing while trying to sacrifice nothing to happiness but to creation, for the sake of knowing and creating, of being totally aware, of growing like a real man should. I have recently felt like Flaubert, tearing his hair out, hidden away and thinking, reading, seeing no one..... just to say it has been a week and " I've written nearly 8 pages! "

" In whatever form it happens to take, and whatever its cause, exile -- at its start -- is an academy of intoxication. And it is not given to everyone to be intoxicated. It is a limit situation and resembles the extremity of the poetic state It is not easy to be **nowhere**, when no external condition obliges you to do so. "

-- E. M. Cioran

November 17

Liberation day here in the CR. Seven short years ago was the fall of communism and the arrival of democracy or in more exact terms, the market place. But where is this freedom, if it only were so simple! If only it were a matter of a change of government, a few reforms here, a change of personnel there and poof! freedom! Such is the gullibility, the hope man lives with strung like an albatross around his neck. Such folly only the poet seems to see through, mankind bless them, are so gullible, like gulls gathering for bread crumbs on the square. Heading nowhere, utopia is the mirage that flashes across the road and makes the man pick up the lunch bucket and the woman sit at her desk. But freedom is only gained through effort, personal effort. The modern road to freedom is to forsake our selves, to sell our souls for this precious commodity. But we are not given freedom only a resemblance, a sedative. Civilization and society contain both the disease and the cure -- in allowing us to have the illusion of freedom we are given just enough rope to tie ourselves up, but not enough to hang ourselves and escape to another world. We are all sell outs in the end. I look at dear Hemmingway's picture and think of him this Nov. 17. I think of all his folly and how he struggled as I to find liberation in a small personal form of truth, not in a new TV, another better job or white teeth. How for all his faults he stuck it out until the end and said some invaluable things, left a few crumbs for us gulls on the cold, wet cobblestones of life. Like his words to paraphrase, " Life breaks everyone in the end. The old, the young, theAnd those of strength who refuse to break, it kills. You will live a little longer but you'll die in the end too. "

Freedom is to realize who you are and what it is that you are here for. Not some grandiose design, just a sense of destiny felt. True freedom is necessity realised, as

old Hegel said. It isn't choice, it's not having a choice, the strength of conviction, belief. That is why in the CR I see so little choice, why in this great world of possibility I see so little freedom. People are sheep who wander deep into deception, only to sleep awake.

My own struggles as a writer are coming to a head. Finally crossing a line, I'm in the no-man's land of knowledge and strength. A great man must forsake inertia, deny the lie and go into himself to be reborn. Most people are so adrift and lost they never experience, freedom, a necessity apparent and true before their eyes. They never experience the horrific vision of one who see's what must be, so mucking about they are, washing their drawers, going for pedicures and looking at the new summer catalogue. Krishna's appearance before Arjuna is just a pretty story to them, a suitable tale for dear old Disney, not the reality behind their rose coloured glasses, behind their low frequency memories and machinations.

I have always struggled with the question of my own relation to other men. Humility to me has always been a cornerstone of my "beingness", that we are only how we act towards others. I was brought up humble, working class and know first hand the pain of the "common man" (but how I hate that phrase, what man is common!). But yet I have great swells of power, of impotence, where the light of life is forced through me and I see my specialness, what I must do, why I am here. It is difficult to describe this bursting of will and strength, especially for one almost ashamed of it. I am like at times, Van Vogt's right man, the man who is above other men in his belief in his infallibility. An Alpha male. The man who when confronted with his crime takes his punishment on the chin but still can't see the crime. The man who says " but I couldn't have done anything else". It is Charles Panzram beyond good and evil, shouting from the scaffold, "Will you hurry up with this, I could have killed 6 men in the time your taking!". One might convincingly argue that all great artists are

those who channel these impulses into creative acts. Great artists are only criminals of a different ilk, men of power, purpose and will who climb over the mass and gravel. Insanity is when this process isn't recognized by the world at large, when megalomania ensues and a hidden, dream like world bubble is built until the day it bursts. Yes, criminality and creativity a fascinating subject. Degas put it succinctly when he said, " an artist paints a picture with the same feeling a thief steals. " .

I have long fought the feeling of taking my art too seriously, but yet it persists. The world at large neglects and despises thought, knowledge. Even worse is the trite lip service they pay the "thinker". He is respected and thrown crumbs, then off they go to look in the shop windows! If only they'd sit another hour and listen. This is the poet's plea, who will listen??? But one must be what one is. All has a place, a time, I don't know about. I sing my songs defiantly but with a firm knowledge of no reward. The thing in and of itself must be the reward. I don't know who said it but it is bang on --- writing is a matter wholly of character, not technique. Or in a perversion of Nietzsche's well know quote, " He who has a Why to write can bear any How, anyone can learn How to write, but no one can learn What/Why to write. " Now, end of the digression and back to my poetry notebook, waiting on that feeling that is indescribable, the OM that scatters letters into words, words into lines, lines into poems, poems into thoughts and thoughts into creation.

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November 23

A restless day of words whirling in the head. I get up and make something to eat, I walk between my two small rooms, I go to the washroom, I do the dishes. But still the words flood and persist. So many small, insignificant acts to perform in the course of a day. Annoying, so annoying this seemingly "unnecessary", these

automatic responses, these acts of ball and chain! But yet they are done, they are in the way and must be cleared away, swept up.

A poet recognizes the slavery of the individual. His or her inability to resist the common dictates of life, accepting life unconditionally. It just seems to happen to them and if you should ask, "Why do you do that?", they would stare at you blankly and dumbfounded, shrug their shoulders and say, "Just because.". They are as Piaget's children in Geneva playing marbles. When asked why they play it that way, they can only reply, "But that's the way marbles are played!". Unlike the poet, there is no other reality, no imperative other than the given. People don't give life, they are given it.

The poet in his half asleep world senses another need, another answer. He doesn't just hear the questions he already knows the answer to. He goes beyond the boundary of knowledge into spirit and substance. He searches for the words to express this feeling, the uneasiness that makes him walk from room to room, questioning. But like me this morning, he fails. All poems are failures. But all failures are but the need to try again, so he does.

This morning I awoke with a howl swirling in my head. I searched for the final words to say all, to fling out at the world until in shock the words don't return. A way to say some finality, the tiredness I feel. A way to declare to all, the life that is there but which to them just seems to get in the way. As a poet I sit above the world, this city, the bustling and "everydayness". I sit and watch the great spectacle. Different, I looked down alone and separate. This is the poet's curse and blessing, this forever feeling of being separate from humanity. But also a blessing because it drives him to be a part, to search for in the only way he knows, the resolution of this pain. Search in the form of truth, of poetry, of being authentic in his thoughts. Search until

there is the great silence, the pain of togetherness, the howl that awakes all in their dreams they live alive.

“ Shorter, shorter, until one syllable is left that says everything.”

Elias Canetti, **The Secret Heart of the Clock.**

Sadness as I once wrote in a poem, is the poet's soil, the earth he rises from. It is essential to his metabolism, like iron or magnesium. Sadness coats everything. Joy just the momentary forgetting of this master, this mother. Sadness is there for the poet because he sees the futility of human action, that all else passes. He rages only from this sadness, rages that all happens to the fool as well as the wise man. Like Ecclesiastes he cries for human frailty, he cries for human suffering, he cries for the answer that won't come. The flower of poetry is grown only watered as it is by the poet's tears, the wet earth that he really is. Dismembered from the rest of humanity, the poet can only look down at the world in sadness. Poetry a search for the words to express this fact, to fight the vanity of existence, to at least give it a mokem of meaning. At least to offer something to that unknown, offer something to say, “ Ha, there, at least we've understood this much!”. and too because the poem is filled with sadness, he is forever at the end, forever saying good bye. He is like a dying man, but a dying man who continually is born again, who is reprieved at the bed side by a mysterious agent. The disease goes into remission only so he can pick at his sores again.

That said, I must complicate things a little. I don't believe that a poet can write out of sadness alone. I've tried, the last few months depressive and heavy. Not a lasting phrase or a penetrating thrust born. A poet always writes greatly out of confidence, out of joy, in his glimpse of things outside of the sadness he bears witness to. A poem is always the crack of light let into the poet's dark room. Thus, he or she

needs both joy and sadness, despair and delight. When I write god forsaken "good" poetry, I feel this infusion of insulin, the spark of sugared life in my heavy heart. Then, the words rise up and pop out of my mouth like a watermelon seed off a Chinese man's lips on a sweltering day. Sadness yes, but also the longing for the sun!

" I am in the final turn. I would like to say farewell to you somehow or other. I long to howl in an inhuman voice so that I am heard in the most distant corner of the planet and perhaps even in neighbouring constellations or where the Lord God resides. Is that vanity? Or a duty? Or an instinct which commands us castaways, us cosmic castaways, to shout through the ages into starry space."

Tadeusz Konwicki, **A Minor Apocalypse**

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November 24

Re-reading yesterday's scratch I realised how much I too fail. How hard it is to explain and communicate this feeling of frustration, even in such a free for all forum as a journal. First one must somehow summon up the courage and confront the facts of oneself. Then sift through them discarding maudlin illusion, the trite and dishonest emotions. Finally there are the words to be rolled through, the right words to fall upon and make your own.

I have been picking through the Czech edition of Bohumil Hrabal's "Muj Svet" (My World). I agree with his plain, to the point, bone and marrow answer to the question, "What's the hardest part of writing?". His reply being, " Finding a reason to sit down and write." Somehow if the writer will get to the desk and wait, this miracle of words

will happen. If it doesn't then he or she'd better start thinking of other ways to fill the yawning moments of life. Myself, I have a hard time just "sitting and waiting", believing as I do in writing as that which comes despite our efforts otherwise. It is not a positive vocation but rather something which happens in spite of all attempts otherwise. But yet, there must be a balance and though I hate the stifling, stiff world of habit, at least sitting down to write every day at a certain hour allows the writer to concentrate on writing and not the "thinking about writing", what he's going to write, or might do. But I do think that most writers would agree with me when I say that I wouldn't wish this "way of life" upon anyone. It isn't just something done but something one must do. It is in the end a calling. Who is calling we just don't know yet.

I have always been an avid reader and reading gets in the way of my writing. But I set no limits on myself, I just try and feel my way between the two. Each should compliment the other. A good reader doesn't necessarily make a good writer, but a good writer should make a good reader.

What a wonderful sight my eyes graced today! I was returning from the sauna, sweating out my frustration while reading the poems of St. John of the Cross and thinking about how foolishly so many have tried to reach God (mescaline, heroin, booze, mountain retreats, vows) when the light is always right there..... returning home to my little apartment when I saw a young boy approaching me. He almost walked right into me so entranced he was with a slim volume of something.

Reminded me of myself at his age and still, reminded me that reading is still alive in the young and that despite so many battles being lost, the war isn't. The war won't be lost so long as young men such as himself continue to recreate and hold up the world through reading. Yes, a splendid sight, almost beatific. Maybe I was seeing with the fresh and loving eyes of humble John?

Much has been said about the current fact that we no longer read, that we are “amusing ourselves to death” to put it as Postman did. I quite agree and won’t regurgitate all the polemic. What I do have great qualms about is the fact that many commentators in the “literacy” debate (or may I say debacle?), and most of the public that has an interest, think that when we read we don’t “hear” the words. There is the assumption that great writers write not just with imagery and ideas but also rhythm and sound. True. One can’t think of Joyce or Faulkner without a particular “wavelength” buzzing in one’s head. But yet most people feel that all great authors should be read aloud, more so with poetry, so that we “hear” the language as it originally was intended. Here, I must disagree. the ear is not something which is wholly external. Try thinking of a favourite line of poetry, say Eliot’s,

“ Do I dare
Disturb the universe
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.”

Say the verse outloud, what do you hear? There is no arguing with the poetic genius, his poet’s ear. We can “hear” it in the words and their natural fit and compliment. He is hooked into the true sound and natural wavelength of things. But read the line again. Don’t you hear the same in your head? What is the difference, spoken or otherwise? A great poet gives us the words sounded to thought. I see no need to revert to oral readings so that we can hear the beauty of words. I hear them when I read them. Maybe the argument for oral readings has some merit as a social function (though I’m personally against all that befuddlery, gallant as it is) but that’s as far as it should be taken.

The best metaphor for reading I know of is the metaphor of prayer. It is a way we think out existence, fill our personal universe with meaning through the divine

words given by a mystery bigger than us. If reading is a form of prayer, I will say a little prayer for that young boy bouncing down the street today, his head full of gunslingers, mudslingers, misfits and miscreants. Somewhere in the word he will find himself, his special self and in that way he might be our salvation. So long as he keeps reading.

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November 25th

I got a letter today from a friend who has been accepted (and I almost wrote unconsciously excepted) into a writer's program. I had a hearty laugh and it did me a lot of good. Not that I don't doubt my friend's sincerity or talent --- no, precisely because of it. As if we can teach art! Teach writing or poetry! If only it were that simple. And this goes arm in arm with the fashion these days of making the artist into an anybody --- poetry contests, festivals, stand up and say something poetry, workshops, " We will publish your book" ads, literary readings, writer's in residences, the literary tour If I sound so cynical it is because I wholeheartedly am. It is all a development of the art as commerce, a slavery and yolk cast over the artist in the guise of conformity. But great art is always a "going beyond" , this can't be taught, this feeling for the age and then flinging oneself into the darkness. It must be done alone, not in a classroom or before nose blowing pretenders. You learn only through doing, bit by bit, what one's feelings say you must. There are no decisions, no need for tenure or grants or travel stipends or the back slapping of paid complimentors (so called teachers). Art in essence is not a "look at me", dime store mirror. Van Gogh who knew this only too well says,

"What is drawing (or writing or any art, my italics)? How does one learn it? It is working through an invisible iron wall that seems to stand between what one feels and what one can do. How is one to

get through that wall -- since pounding against it is of no use? One must undermine the wall and drill through it slowly and patiently, in my opinion."

Slowly! Slowly! A fine wine! But yet as my list of the above attests, all things seek a quickness, a need to know now, a need for an answer, a saviour, a learning and knowledge. But it is never that easy, not in life and less so in art. So my good friend good luck, by mistakes we learn. Get your diploma and put it on your wall, I have already nailed mine to my heart.

"I, who believe that every artist should be his own teacher, cannot dream of setting myself up as a professor. I cannot teach my art, nor the art of any school whatever, since I deny that art can be taught, or, in other words, I maintain that art is completely individual, and is, for each artist, nothing but the talent issuing from his own inspiration and his own studies of tradition."

-- Gustave Courbet, a letter to his potential students.

Finally, to all those who might question the above with the retort, " then why are you bothering to say all this, aren't you doing all this only in the name of teaching, only to tell people how to live?" To all those I say, I don't want to tell anyone how to live, I don't teach --- I warn. A prophet is no teacher. Don't mistake the light for the sun.

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November 29

Why do I do what I do? Why write? This question more than any other is at the end of all acts. It is the last room a man exhausted stumbles upon in a house with so

many rooms, so many mirrors, so much darkness. The answer to this question hides like a crack of light beyond the door at the other end of the room. The end of all inquiry, its height, is a returning into itself, a stepping out of fate and necessity and to insist on an answer so to be made human again. Human and full of possibility and choice.

Paz in that book to end all other books, **The Bow and the Lyre**, suggests in his forward that,

“ the only justification for writing is that it tries to answer the question we asked ourselves one day, which will not let us rest until it receives an answer. The great books -- I mean: the necessary books --- are those that can answer the questions that other men, darkly and without formulating them clearly ask.”.

We write ourselves out of a difficult situation in a sense. Not consciously aware, the writer sits at his desk and tackles the problems that itch. Of course writers write for many reasons, money, fame, dreams, lovers, to kill time (Or see Orwell's splendid essay **Why I Write**; sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse, political purpose). But in the end it is a question of not being able to do anything else, it is being pushed in the corner and “having to” do it. I certainly feel this touch of fate, this wind of all things being organized in a way so that I must write. If man were an existential creature, filled with choice inside the world's candy store, I don't think anyone would “choose” to write. There is not much attraction. “Masturbation and tuberculosis”, as one writer starkly and darkly put it. Wasn't it Gertrude Stein who quipped that she wouldn't wish the role of writer onto anyone? Writer's don't seem to choose, they are chosen. Many might disagree with me, but their disagreement would only be the exception which proves the rule. I stand by this statement. The many reasons writers give for writing only camouflage the real

reason, are mere motivators and not the bottom why.

I am wrestling with this problem of why write? Why not go out for a walk, or pick up a book, or blow my nose? Why not? I would if I only could. That seems to be the gist of it. I believe that poetry and freedom are interchangeable, the same. They need no purpose because they are ends in and of themselves. I quote the immortal lines of Pushkin to end, "The purpose of poetry is poetry". End of the matter, all writing is an end in and of itself. We might just as well pose the question "why think?"

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November 30

How not to drink? I spent the whole day stiff and aching, full of demons and denial as my body suffered to purge the remains of last nights many beers, tequilas, champagne and absolute certainty. Can't write after drinking, can't help but drink after writing. Feeling lost, I lose myself in booze and for a moment I am found. But then the morning, those endless mornings I repeat the question, how not to drink? I can't find a way out, but I will fight, I need to find happiness, surety, that absolute feeling of wholeness without the help of alcohol. Or I risk my life. I quote Hemingway on his responsibility, "to last, to get my work done". I must last and get my work done. Instead today was a catonic drifting as it always is after a drinking bout, hours after hours of Spinoza, thinking and nothing else. Hangovers bring productive thinking, but much pain too. I must find a way out, a way around freedom instead by drinking, trying to go right straight through it. Tomorrow then, another day in search of the answer to the question, How does one stop drinking?

A balanced equation -- " I drink to forget but I don't forget to drink."

December 01

Everyone is abuzz and cackling about the political situation here in the Czech Republic. A bribe/money scandal, politicians going to the pot to serve themselves, a government and PM resigning. I don't have much to say. Doesn't the world continue irregardless, we still get up, go out the front door, buy our bread and shit it out? So much buffoonery, imaginative speculation. I cannot find the real connection between government and the people except in the land of myth, that we believe it much more important than it is. This mirage would be so laughable if it hasn't caused and continues to cause us all so much pain. But there is no way back, the deals been struck, myth and mind cannot simply be erased, expunged.

A siren screams outside my window, an ambulance rushes a dying woman to the hospital. Does she care if the government is here today or not. What good are their conferences and number juggling to her? I have no interest in their lies, the world around us here and now is much more important. I echo Franz Kafka's diary entry from this same Prague; 07/28 /1914. War in Europe. Went swimming. Or, 12/01/1997. P.M. Klaus resigns. Made chicken soup. "the dogs bark, the caravan passes."

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December 02

Where does the centre hold? Why are all things as they are, what mirade and infinite set of circumstances leads just to the moment? Is it all a delusion, something fed us by the narcotic of the spirit?

I get up and the bed is floating in the room, the window is black, the walls and

every "thing" are colours I've never seen before and can't describe. I drift down to the floor and follow the waves of heaping linoleum into the kitchen. I pour coffee into a mug that grows before my eyes, soon enveloping all. I push it aside and watch the coffee burn a hole in the neighbour's wall as it drifts sideways. I look out the kitchen window; cars are crashing into each other, the river is a bed of cotton fluff flowing into the mountains which form the shape of a mouth, dogs are cock-a-doodle -doodling, two men are slapping each other, a woman squatting is pissing into the gutter, the trees are growing into the ground, the ground a mush of oatmeal everyone is slogging through, newspapers and flags fill the air and are blown forcefully but go through anything they hit, the sky doesn't exist..... I don't know how to describe this, where does the centre hold?

I awoke this morning and first thought of the miracle of this dream which is life. I first thought of what will happen today, next why, why this and not something else? Who gives **IT** to us, just like **THAT**? Unanswerable questions, but questions some men ask themselves, such as the question, "why am I me, not her?". We ask but there is no answer, just an eventuality. So, is it true what dear old Nietzsche said, that "we only ask the questions which we already have the answers of"? Where is the answer this morning as I pour my coffee into my mug. Why this way not another? Who makes the rules?

Doubt, doubt alone makes these questions possible and gives freedom its proper playground. Doubt is the only clay idol for a philosopher, a poet, a good writer, a religious man --- a human man. Doubt is the bridge that takes us between what is and what could be, it is a talisman we wear around our necks, a faith that forever moves forward. We don't believe in doubt, belief doesn't move, it rots. We have faith in doubt, in this boat that heads out into dark waters, into a mouth of fire in the west, into things/life different from what must be. Doubt is the search for where the centre

holds, it follows an elusive gravity, a gravity that so few people feel and follow. This morning as always I follow, I go into the world doubt full.

“...Our business, if we desire to live a life, not utterly devoid of meaning and significance, is to accept nothing which contradicts our basic experience merely because it comes to us from tradition or convention or authority. It may well be that we shall be wrong; but our self-expression is thwarted at the root unless the certainties we are asked to accept coincide with the certainties we experience. That is why the condition of freedom in any state is always a widespread and consistent skepticism of the canons upon which power insists.”

-- Harold Laski, *The Danger of Obedience*.

“ Disobedience is man's original virtue.”

-- Oscar Wilde

Pensees Moments Chance

I have sat down not knowing what to write. Empty yet full. Full of expectation, the spectacular explosion of chance which is life, as the moments pass full of thoughts given. Empty.

I look at the book shelf, so much written, so many words, so much babble! Even on my shelves! I search for their titles through the morning light -- I only can see names. Names in the name of fame have drowned out the ideas. Now for us, only biography's blaze the truth, the real books hide like shy girls in the corner of the gymnasium, afraid to dance. Has it always been so? When has the author been less important, his words more so? I think of my ideal republic, my nowhere, utopia,

where I'd always dreamed of a place where authors would produce books without the acknowledgement of their names. We could guess that's all, a celebration of the art and not the man, for the man is but a vessel, a mirror to shine back truth, beauty or whatever you call that feeling of reading something "sparkling", of belonging to that immense MINority.

The TV flickers with the nonsense of the world. Medium, mundane. Octavio Paz reflects that more people than ever are reading poetry. True. But there are now more people who might read it. Poetry though, forms less of the consciousness of our age, it is an outcast, a non-entity, for it makes nothing happen. Unlike the car commercial which just filled my last 30 seconds. Ads are mirages that mesmerize the mind; they make us get up out of a warm bed and pull the ox cart, man the offices and stamp our papers. It makes us dream of an end, it alludes to freedom and thus as all illusions, enslaves. We are all guilty, all victims. In fact, the ads of today are the poetry of yesterday. They make us imagine, dream. They are full of symbols, metaphors unconsciously accepted. Short, they explode in the end with a surprise, an orgasm of idea. The difference being that this idea makes something happen, a poem is so important because it makes nothing happen. One is thus free, the other propaganda.

It is so strange how we have turned poetry into a commodity, something that should be against material culture because it is a commerce of the spirit. This being why it is so subversive, unable as we are to buy it, sell it, in a sense even use it. It has no value and thus is outside the market place which seems to be everywhere. But western culture is trying its best to tame this beast. It has first tried to institutionalise it in the cellophane atmosphere of academia, the universities (factories) of conformity. Next, it has tried to dumb it down, market the workshops and therapeutic concept, make contests out of it --- suck any belief "in meaning" out of it.

Demeaning it. Now ad men are hired to be the new poets, all is catch phrase and look at me. We have made poetry too public, robbed it of it's power, it's force of being personal and hidden in us -- IN EACH OF US. The paradox cannot be gotten around, poetry can only be saved when we return it to the realm of inner spirit and meaning, where it once again can form our symbols and brandish meaning in the frosty clime of these times. We must make poetry a secret again, then it will truly live again, be fresh, a flower from the hidden seed. Poetry can only live in a world of intimacy.

The following, from Harper's Magazine, that island of decency in a sea of garbage, drives home the point forcefully. It comes from an address by Richard Howard the editor of **The Paris Review** at the Pen Literary Awards (and what a paradox here, but where isn't there?);

“Poetry will flourish - in terminal capitalism as in terminal communism - only when it is perceived as a valuable and virtually disallowed production that must be sought by need and desire. We must eroticize the situation of poetry where we have only sanitized it; we must remember that poetry is, in the ultimate sense, a secretion from within, not a suntan lotion for external use only. “

I turn my head into a magazine. An article about ballet, the ballerina comments that there are no more Nureyevs, “after Nureyev the dancers of today lack intelligence, imagination and freedom.”. Could it be the eye that deceives, its independence should have warned us all years ago of its malicious designs. Could it be that she can't see freedom, her eyes don't dance, she is a victim of her age, her eyes, her eyes aging?

December 04

Clouds, grey, a dullness heavy as a prison cell outside. Nothing but grey and the soot of sputtering trucks and coal coughing houses. Dickensian London. Three weeks now without any sign of the sun, I scratch off the days in my running diary, a Monte Cristo of the mind. My soul aches, physically aches for the sun. When? Can a man live like this? Unfortunately yes, we can bear anything, as that great experiment of human character, the lager so shockingly screams.

Damp and in the doldrums, a sure fired cure (albeit temporary) are the letters of Irving Layton, my Hemingway of the harp. He helps me stay away from the bottomless bottle or the more unfathomable nature of a bare woman's thigh.

Straight to the heart he sings of poetry as "force", "sensuality", "vigour". A prophet of locust and honey he stammers and swaggers through the mediocrity, the sniffing, idiotic intellegentsia, cursing and creating his own universe of truth and essence. Nobody shoots as straight from the lip as Layton and one must admire him for it. His words are vitriol, pure heroine to my blood, a red carpet to the sun.

Layton must have been quite the son of a bitch. But so have so many other great writers. It almost seems a necessary quality, the sneer of Dostoevsky, the rage of Tolstoy, the maliciousness of Milton. But one mustn't take all the sound and fury for only greatness. If we have learnt anything about art it is that it comes in many forms and through many kinds of vessels. Good writers are good writers and can be timid as well as tempestuous. There are many roads to God. A first rate writer isn't of kind but character -- not a kind of character but the "force" of character as shown through words. Vision given light, sleep awakened. Writer's are born not paid, as has been so truly quipped. Or as (Hemingway, Faulkner? said, " nothing can injure a man's writing if he's a first-rate writer. Then again, if a man is not a first-rate writer, there's

not anything that can help it much.”).

Reading Layton's diatribe and rant at Canadian WASPs, the white bread, white nosed, well bred, in bed, in bred, polo, market minded, high brows --- I was reminded of a good laugh I had once at their unknown expense (and isn't the best laugh always that given quietly, unexpectedly?). I was in the almost all white bowels of the Toronto Lawn and Tennis Club, in one of a poet's many disguises. Between sets of sit-ups I stood up to gaze at the boredom between all the housewives eyes, the heat coming from between their thighs. I leaned in need of relief against the wall and before my eyes was a sign which read: (and this is true, I take no liberties as a writer here, I swear.) " Please keep the window firmly closed. We have had trouble with wasps lately. The room is climate controlled."

Last week I had a visit from some former students, giggling, bubbly schoolgirls. A few years ago as students they had been young fearless children, now at my door gawky, tentative teenagers. I invited them in and watched as they fidgeted in their chairs and fought for something to say in English. I was really honoured by their recognition of someone who had tried to make a difference in their lives. Not just teach the curriculum but circumvent it and appeal to something deeper and more human. But was I mistaken? Perhaps their youthful grins and young girl charm was not for any reason other than that they were amorous, idolizing my confidence and openness. Teacher - student syndrome, falling in love with your tyrant. It happens the world over. Probably this is closer to the truth. But it is nice to believe in the lie ---- life, all lives prove this.

I have never given one inch of respect to adults as "adults". The young are so easily led astray, so fiendishly fooled by their elders. Adults seem impressive but it is all a facade, like my facade before these young girls. If anything, adults deserve

less respect than the young. Their conservatism, falsity, lies, slogging pedantry, consumerism and ruttishness is all rot to the core. Adults deserve nobody's respect merely in terms of their age, position. Adults slowly give in and die, they die in that they refuse to keep in touch with the live wire of life, to accumulate, to have and not be. Their priorities are all anti-life. It must be so or why would they have children? Most adults realizing their own ways but not brave enough to change, give up and have children with the hope that they may live where they couldn't. But then the young are fooled, they don't ever see through the film, the pomp and pretence that adults, so afraid, build, put up. The circle rolls around again.

December 07

A Sunday, a melancholic, sanguine day. Maybe it's the Dostoevskian wet snow, the fact Christmas is approaching. Life's a mystery to me, why I feel what I feel an unknown, the X factor.

Out running through the slush early this morning I ran by the local market. A place where early every Sunday anyone with anything to sell or buy comes. Busy with the tussle of humanity's need to have, have anything, simply the feeling of possessing, a feeling that so quickly flees and must be endlessly re-invented, re-bought. An amazing sight similar to what I've seen the world over. If the world is becoming more homogeneous, it isn't just that the whole world speaks the language of Coca-Cola or Marlboro. It is more so because the spirit of why we do things is becoming so much the same. In the furthest reaches of the world and in the great metropolises all humanity seems to dance to the drum of getting, having. There is an endless dreaming of acquiring this or that, so much time spent walking in a haze past windows or flipping through catalogues or dreaming about the new TV set at the end of the month's wage.

It is a wonder how many people are up so early this Sunday, scurrying about like squirrels among all the junk, the litter of civilization. Many of these same people will then head off to church, to sing praise to a god they know only in head not in spirit. Who will be our irreverent prophet who might howl and scream through the stalls of these markets, overturning tables, spilling goods, chasing out the money changers, casting in spirit? Who?

It reminds me of when I came looking for an apartment here in the CR this spring. I was met by a nice, spry old lady and shown my current apartment. Graciously, she showed me everything, the rooms, the toilet, the appliances, the balcony. She kindly offered me tea as we sat down to discuss price and specifics. Looking around the apartment I was struck not by anything so much as all the nicknackery, hundreds of little ceramic angels, small plastic flowers, miniature cups and crosses all placed here and there like tokens, idols to some dime store deity. They were everywhere! I was quite comfortable with all the details of our contract but for the fact that she kept impressing upon me that I wasn't to touch any of the "things" in the apartment, and that all was itemized. It seems that the elderly more than even the young, become their things, live through them. My only comment, what a waste of human energy, emotion, vitality -- to have it invested and encased in the cold of things. And isn't this now the message we need to here this Christmas? Needless to say, upon moving in I gathered up all her odds and ends and filled a few big boxes which I deposited in storage downstairs. Can she hear their screams to get out?

Yes, feeling dull and grey. My experiment here, to hide and to write doesn't seem to be working out, bearing results. Not a lot of writing, few poems. It's hard adjusting to my aloneness, hard to adjust to being a word slinger, confronting myself so often. But I also can't help doing it. I've been thinking of who I am, what I really want or

have to do in this short time I'm allotted here on this planet of swirling dust and insignificance. A hard task, I'm so full of contradiction, the human soul so moving and vast. If anything, I just must continue to feel life, to not be broken by it. Reading one of my favourite authors yesterday morning, Ryszard Kapuscinsky, I came upon this amazing and to me, very meaningful anecdote. It bears recounting in full as follows;

"Describe the old man in the Mexican desert. I was driving along in a car and far off I spotted something that looked like an Indian hat lying on the sand. I stopped and walked towards it. Under the hat sat an Indian in a shallow hole that he had dug in the sand to protect himself from the wind. In front of him stood a wooden gramophone with a shabby, bashed-in megaphone. The old man was turning the crank the whole time (the wind-up spring was obviously long gone) and playing one record -- he had only one record -- which was so worn out that the grooves were barely there. From the tube issued a hoarse roar, crackling and the disordered tatters of a Latin American song: Rio Manzanares dejame pasar (Rio Manzanares, let me cross). Even though I had greeted him and stood in front of him for a long time, the old man paid no attention to me. "Papa." I finally shouted. "there is no river here."

He kept quiet. Then, after a while, he replied, "Son, I am the river and I can't cross myself." He said nothing more, but kept turning the crank and listening to the record."

Only in Mexico, the land of all possibility..... only in MexicoIf you read Paz's **The Labyrinth of Solitude** or Lowry's **Under the Volcano**, you will appreciate this fact.

December 13

Christmas is soon, not the greatest time to be alone, far from home and in a strange country, a strange "cold" country. But I need to finish a book that I'm writing and have promised others I would. My heart isn't in it, to write something dumbed down, a self-help type of thing like so many of those wet rags that line the best sellers lists. It seems that only biographies and "make me a better person" books sell these days, all bubble gum, worthless. But such is the lot of the poor writer. It isn't that I can't write a good book about life, living. No, the point is that one may never learn from a book, life isn't a set of rules, a do this, don't think about that, paint by numbers affair. I can't write the bloody thing precisely because I believe in the volatility of the human soul, that a human being is human precisely because no matter how he knows to live, he is free to disobey, to do something in spite of himself. I can't write the thing because I fundamentally don't believe that words should be used in this fashion, dressed up propaganda that's all it is.

Relating to this (as all things do relate to each other in regards to the thinker, the "seer" -- and Koestler's "Roots of Co-incidence is a good primer on this subject, by such a great head too), I looked at my shelf of books a few moments ago, trying to just relax and be (ie. not think). My eyes fell upon a volume whose title seemed to say, Immoral Poems. Upon closer inspection I viewed the proper title, Immortal Poems. A slip of the eye? or something telling me something, that the only great poems are immoral, slap in the face, a cold shower, an awaking to culture's hypnotic constraints. Can an immortal poem not be immoral, that is the question? Ever curious about co-incidence, how the eye deceives, I picked up the volume and flipped through its pages until hit by something of interest. And what did fate offer me? An immorality, the following poem by Ezra Pound, **An Immorality**.

Sing we for love and idleness
Naught else is worth the having

Though I have been in many a land,
There is naught else in living.

And I would rather have my sweet,
Though rose-leaves die of grieving,

Than do high deeds in Hungary
To pass all men's believing.

My sentiments exactly, an immortal poem if such a beast exists, such our forgetfulness, who remembers Liszt? Does too, an immortal man exist? Happily still hums Herodotus? Time will tell, unfortunately not us.

December 22

Just a few days to go before Christmas and the crowds are out in full, shopping, a frenzy of trinketeering so to show their repressed love through "things". The image of fish spawning, rushing up at thrown bread crumbs pops to mind. Perhaps because of the great tubs of carp in the streets here, the tradition here being to eat this rather humble fish on Christmas eve. If I could design Christmas with only one variation it would be to stop the giving of "bought" (as in with our soul) things and have it replaced with a tradition of giving something of what one has. If people had to give from what they had, they might appreciate what they receive more, appreciate in a far deeper and lasting way. I know of this tradition because it is practised by the Navajo, who upon making a new friend cement the ties through an exchange of their own wealth, not impersonal junk. Giving of oneself, this should be the spirit of Christmas, of any man or woman.

I'm on holidays and have time to think, to read, to just be. My time to fight within for the real man I am, to save myself from the world which wants to mould me into a

cookie cut copy of someone else.

I have no money to travel, see the few friends I have this side of the world. I make almost nothing here and every day is a challenge in that way. But a man should suffer in these true ways, all the better if he is a writer. It is a way of confronting reality, of enlarging oneself through experience and not just slogging through it. I spent my last 200 crowns (\$8.00) on a bus ticket to Terezin, the Czech death camp where so many Jews and Gypsies were interned before becoming human kindling. It was my own way of dealing with the hoarding, buying, splurging, gorging, defecatory event of Christmas. A way of remembering that man's cruelty to man continues despite the carnival of Christmas cheer, my way of trying to understand though I never can. I sat outside after going through the museum just before it closed and wet to the bone from the rain tried to break through the pain of the place, break through to some truth. I couldn't, its secret was left in the hearts of those who suffered, only a few crumbs scattered in memory and fact, left for us to scent and make us beware.

Cold and hungry, but at least with dreams of a house full of food waiting for me, I sat on the jerky, old Hungarian bus and read a book of interviews with "Canadian" authors. I highlight this word because it seems absurd to think of writers as being bound by geography, the geography of the land and not the language. More paradoxically I found more than a few European exiles in the volume, notably Gyorgy Faludy and Joseph Skvorecky. What exactly is Canadian literature but a great mix of writing from the world over, a place of literature in a hundred or more languages, where Canadian is defined not by what is written but just the fact that it is written in the splendour of this truly free nation. My own experience in university is just the opposite, there the establishment clearly had aims (which endure but are almost defeated) of establishing Canada - LIT 101, a literature said to be about

snow, mosquitoes, bush, protestantism and the work ethic. Fortunately the reality is far from this, and Canadian writing defies definition. Unfortunately some continue this train of ill hitched thought and even worse continue with a vein of ethnic marking, using such terms as Vietnamese - Canadian writing or Ukrainian - Canadian literature. People always want to straight jacket something. Would we call Mann an American - German writer? Or Lowry Mexican - British? It is all on the level of farce, is Solzhenitsyn Russo-American? Ah, writing fortunately knows no barrier but itself, its own tongue, own mother. Even more to the point, writers belong not to nations or even ethnic or political grouping, but to the human heart, simple as it is everywhere.

Poetry in Canada seems so weak, so inward and subjective. Faludy comments in his interview about this, how poets today don't tackle the fundamental problems of the world. They don't see the value of poetry as being something in the here and now, as a banner of change, a torch of human dignity. They continue to moan on about themselves while so much misery in the world is blatantly ignored.

Compassion in poetry has gone out of fashion. The pain of life is replaced by the pain of me, in today's poetry. Where is the poet who would want to change the world, who would use poems as Molotov cocktails hurled at the sleeping western middle class who think of poverty, suffering and injustice as something on TV or worse, as something "they" (70% of humanity) go through because they don't have the money for a Lexus or lost their Timex. Where are the poet's of liberation, the Jose Marti's who would dare reveal the pain of the world as it really is, in the billions who only have the clothes on their backs and the hope of lasting until tomorrow. Where is this poem, this poet amid the buffoonery of this Christmas, where so much is spent on so little, where like today's poets their is an absorption into our "unreal" selves (not even into our honest, true selves), into our own petty problems, into the comic, crying as we do for a few more dollars to buy our plump

girlfriend a second battery operated, portable hair dryer. Where? Where? Where? I suggest that it exists, it just doesn't have an audience. We who could hear it chose not to --- they who can't hear it because of their pain and squalor, can't even chose to hear it.

Another gem at the end of Faludy's interview.

“ Poetry, freedom. It is like air. You know you must have it only when it is taken away from you. “

The same too with compassion. You know you must have it only when it is not given to you. In that sense we need more uncompassionate acts against ourselves so we may awake. As it is, we are too giving, giving as we do, too much discompassion, ignorant disregard for the downtrodden, the poor, the sick, those really busy “living”. Not enough to ourselves, the “living dead”. This must become the revolutionary agenda of the poet, to tell it as it is, in dance and step with freedom, to awake us all from this nightmare of sloth we stagger and slosh through.

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December 24

Christmas eve. Wet and rainy in the heart of Europe, wet and rainy in this poet's heart also. So far away from my loved ones, the crisp, clear weather of snowy Canada, so alone. A fierce hangover from my attempt to run away from my “tiredness”, my emptiness, last night, doesn't help either. Awoke to the sounds of the old men going through the garbage bin outside, below my window. At least some things don't change over Christmas. No doubt they will have good pickings

tomorrow after the Czechs feast on their carp, potato salad and endless baking. Me, a light meal of corn on the cob to summon up the memories of summer, the opening, of farms and youth. Taste and smell are the two most direct ways to strong memory. What I would give at this moment for the wafting odour of turkey!

Alone. I feel like an old man, weary of life but still thankful too. An old man shut away in his room, all his friends passed on, his family busy with their things, an old love now just a memory. Old men and poetry have a lot in common. I feel so much older than my 35 years, like a man who has lost the edge, stoic he sits through all that passes, an old Chinese man on a park bench, every now and then getting up to do some Tai-chi. A sail without wind I await the filling. It will come. I await on happiness, something that you just can't rush, be anxious about. Sustained and purposeful activity will lend its return. Tomorrow more writing, more etching on my heart. It is my metier. Then I will look up in the days to come and see my boat speeding away. This is the rule of life, happiness, of love too.

“ The seed is not afraid of the winter.”

Around my desk are numerous pictures for inspiration. It just dawned on me while writing the above, that other than Picasso's immortal (and immoral) portrait of Dora, all are old men. Tolstoy's face stares up at me, sad, sad eyes with a secret he's trying to share. The same sad eyes of Papa Hemingway pierce through me. Wrinkles of thought framing those eyes of innumerable visions. Northrope Frye, small British lips, eyes curious as a child's, flashing joyful interest. Of course, Hrabal, the face of a head on boxer (and there would have been a match, Hrabal and Hemingway, tete a tete!), tight skin with a jagged etching giving him the appearance of a rock face, scratched on by time, the primal elements. Lastly, there is my favourite picture in the world, a photo of a down and out Moses of a man,

dozing on a park bench. Something about it touches me profoundly, it gives off a whiff of my own destiny. It smells of truth. He's holding a King James Version of the Bible, open in his right hand. On close inspection we can see that it is opened to the last chapter of Jonah, where Jonah weary of life is reproved by god for his anger at the people of Nineveh. It ends with God's words, words which I can imagine this old man nicknamed "the Scholar" by the few park regulars, having muttered to himself before dozing off. They are,

" And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern betwee their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

Jonah 4:11

Yes, a perfect description of any 20th century city, even more so, Toronto. Yes, God spares so many. I for one, in my blessed ignorance, this loneliest of Christmas', I am thankful for just this gift -- the gift of mercy. Now to turn off the machine and return to an empty Christmas eve, an empty apartment, an empty cupboard and so much life!

December 25

Christmas day. So little Christ in this mass though. The Christian world is so filled with violence and hypocrisy, with utter contempt for inner truth, the inner light of conscious truth that we all know in silence as being what is "right". Christmas seems to be a way people live with their contradictory and enslaved selves, a sort of cork where we can release all the pressure that has built up inside ourselves as we all year long support violence, blindly stumble through the regimented responses "culture" has given us. In fact, a whole new branch of psychology could

be written, dealing with holidays and "state" celebrations, how they are like Freud's dreams, how we deal with our built in tensions, hypocrisy. I think of President Clinton this week wandering through the crowds of GIs in Bosnia, preaching the gospel according to the US of A, preaching Christmas thoughts of peace while the world is but a button away from complete annihilation. Ah! Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. Or can we? Or should we?

Alone here this Christmas, it has been a time of reflection upon the message and truth of Christ. Christmas is a time to celebrate this message that he brought, his birth, the word (the TRUTH) made flesh. A time to turn our hearts to the heat of this truth, the light inside of us all. Otherwise, Christmas is just a time of commercialized buying and selling, a time of pagan indulgence, a time as Menchen so preciously put, "to not believe in nothing, but to believe in everything.". Me, I'm no fervent Christian and every day is a battle against my guilt and sin. I lie and cheat with the best of them, but I put the truth in it's place and don't deny my sins, I don't let myself have the comfort of self-justification which seems so popular in this culture of being "unresponsible" for one's acts.

Tolstoy, his **The Kingdom Of God Is Within You**, should be mandatory reading over the Christmas season. It still sings a truth some 100 years on, it still thunders against each of us ignoring our own heart's truth. It makes us each face the unbelievable and miraculous fact that yes, we each inside us know the truth of love, kindness, humility, a truth to guide our actions. We know but don't follow. And if I can be so bold as to offer the following conclusion : Christ's only message was to follow this truth, to move with it in our hearts, his only message was against hypocrisy -- those that knew truth but didn't follow. This is the message we need to hear, to let our children hear, this is the message we need at Christmas, not that if you don't buy a gift for someone, your a letch, inadequate. We have to take the

nipple out of our mouths and stand in the light. This is even more important when we see that freedom, our own precious freedom, is only within us in relation to the distance between our own truth and our actions. As their difference grows and the contradictions too, so must our freedom decrease, until in the extreme we are just robots, slaves that don't know they are slaves. Our lives are just one big fart, blown away by the wind -- they amount to nothing besides mere procreation. This seems to be the condition of so many in the world, so many who won't ever look inside, who refuse to take the nipple out of their mouths and be who they truly are. I guess in the end what it comes down to is that men prefer other's to look after them, they prefer not to be free and responsible. They prefer to have Christmas and never think of Christ or for that matter, just kindness devoid of any other object

I'll end this little sermon tonight, solemnly. Sad at all the misery in the world that doesn't have to be. I'll end with the beautiful parable of the shepherd, John 10:1-6. Read it and then say, who will be the shepherd. The parable wasn't understood because the shepherd is you, Christ is in you and of the flesh still. The kingdom of God is within you.

“ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his won sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.”

Yes, the voice of the truth, our voice, our truth. I think of that sentimental but so powerful movie, **It's a Wonderful Life**. It is so powerful not because George lived and the bank survived but because we witnessed the transformation of a man, a man who walked right through the front door finally, who spoke in his own voice and followed. A man who was his own shepherd, who in losing himself found himself. This is the message of Christmas. If only we had a few more portly and bumbling angels to guide us, maybe the world would be a better place. Maybe.

It is a well known fact that the suicide rate jumps off the chart around Christmas (and isn't it justifiably ludicrous even to think of a suicide rate? But this is another matter). In my solitude I too this Christmas have mulled over the subject, struggled with my own inner contradictions, wondered why go on when the world won't accept my life as I want it to be, lived in truth. Why continue when I must struggle so hard with HOW to live in this society as it is, when it is so hard to live in the light. I have wrestled with all this and have no answer. I follow my fate, I leave my life open to possibility, the possibility of salvation. I struggle. Most of the world does too. It is a miracle that we all don't find a bridge to jump off, a miracle or maybe just the fact that we have so much available to stupefy and dull our senses, so much distraction from life. Christmas makes us face the contradictions of our lives, our acts and our inner truth. Despair is the result. Tolstoy states it bluntly,

“ If there were no external means of dulling their sensibilities, half of mankind would shoot themselves without delay, for to live in opposition to one's reason is the most intolerable condition. And that is the condition of all men of the present day. All men of the modern world exist in a state of continual and flagrant antagonism between their conscience and their way of life. “

Yes, the emptiness of modern life is never more apparent than in the carnivalesque atmosphere and cornucopia of Christmas. It is a mirror we would all do well to look deeply into so to find our selves, our real selves. Amen.

December 26

Yes, I'm writing here a lot. A sign of my own melancholic disposition, my inability to work steadily on other writing projects/commitments. Just can't get into gear, too sad and reflective. I've been writing a lot of poetry but it has amounted to nothing. Drivel, lacking guts and grit, the kind of twaddle any academic in a cushy office with a nice pay check would write to impress; not poetry, politess. So, I'll wait, all good poetry is embroidered by patience -- a waiting and an unwavering eye for the heart of the matter.

Some days you sit there and nothing comes, a Flaubertian frozenness comes over me and I think what's the use of this struggle. Thoughts, ah thoughts!, they come and breeze through the field of the mind all the time, but to write, it is impossible! One mustn't be fooled and look just at what a poet writes, this is just the dross, the drool dribbling over the boiling pot. If only it were easier to explain, all the flashes that always sing, how there is a hum in everything. But alas, it is impossible to communicate, some things are always hidden. But today just emptiness before the machine. So, I decided to treat myself for X-mas and buy an International Herald, always a way to get the ideas brewing again. I just have to pick up a newspaper and whatever I read I rant against -- so much hyperbole, so much mediocrity, trite follow the line, say what they want to hear and damn the truth, silliness! Lately, I've cut right back on newspapers, knowing as I do that once you know the principles, why pinch yourself with the particulars. Also because of my poetic inheritance, so

little money. The Herald now costs about 6 loaves of good, heavy Czech bread. This is my measure of a paper--- in France it is about 4 light baguettes (but oh so tasty!), in Canada, 2 loaves of soft, mushy, gum massaging mould. In the end it didn't matter for after a long wet walk, the newsstand was closed. All things are usually for the better, or if they aren't we at least have the ability to make them seem so.

So little kindness in the world. Why? Even at Christmas time, the violence in all our hearts and which so much is fuelled for, rears its head. Walking home, a young father was telling his son to get a move on as they trudged up the steep slopes around Karlovy Vary. As the son caught up, he grabbed him by the shoulder and gave him a hearty cuff across the side of the head. Me, I just thought about how we pass on man's inhumanity to man, how kindness is so easy but so seldom given. A paradox: we can make another so happy with just a few words, a small deed, an invitation, a smile, but few have the COURAGE to do it. It would seem that the reason is fear, fear guides all our lives. Happiness only he who has no fear and has given up the ghost, the chains around the heart. We all have such a hard time even telling our loved ones we love them, how much more fear to tell others we love them. Why? I have no hard and fast rule or answer, but it seems that this insecurity in ourselves is taught and perpetuated by culture, by fathers, by lawyers and even lovers. It seems that we will never change because we are caught in a self perpetuating drama, before we can be ourselves, others have made us into something other. Only sometimes do some escape and make the leap into the light. But we all crush them, like one would a bug under foot. Civilization invests in perpetuating and teaching violence in subtle ways. In the lyrical vein of Lawrence we can say even more so industrial society. Look at any TV program, sports event, any city neighbourhood. And I'm not only talking about physical violence, I mean violence as anything that issues malevolently from the heart. A stare, a lie, a

forgetting, rushing, leaving, not believing. Ah, to love each other is so easy, why is it so hard? Fear, like also the fear I had, not saying as I should have to this gentleman, the heart of the matter. We must all in our own way reach in and yank out this fear to be free and to love all. This too is a Christmas message, but not just for Christmas time.

December 30

A New Year beckons. A day where we can shed our skin, begin again to be so damned..... just be so damned. What I hate is that man is such a beast of ceremony, of social convention, a follower. New Years sanctifies and embraces our every day slavery -- it is the slave master giving his black beasts of burden a few extra cups of corn on harvest day. It is fire water to the Indians. So much madness, a mist we take as "having to be". Oh if it weren't so! More to the point how can I live without just blindly dancing among the crowd, then staggering off with my hangover the next day? How can I live seeing what I see, knowing but yet failing to fling it out, these few words but scraps of meat off my weighted nature.

This is the dilemma of any honest, seeing man. This is why any great writer writes. The gravity of what he knows sends him forth to use whatever means he can to convey the hell he sees. Forget all the explanations which say a writer writes because he wants to change the world, make things better. He is no lollipop maker. Throw away any thought that he does it for reward, fame, women to fuck or mental inadequacy. Forget those who might say he's just a loafer, useless as a tit on a bull and that he self-justifies this through art. Forget it all like one does a relieving fart! Maybe poor writers write for these god forsaken reasons, but great writers only write to peel off the layers of themselves, to wrestle with the vision within and spill it forth like a breach birth for all the world to see. Pregnant, they search (and search

so sadly, maddenly, haplessly) for a means of extricating this wound and warmth, this world of truth they see. They do what they do because to do nothing would be to die alone with a secret on one's lips. Why do you think the dead's last words are always listened for, bent towards? Unfortunately, the writer must die again and again, leaving but traces, clues towards which to remake this hidden jewel. So, here I sit spinning around and around, doing what all writers must do, putting one word after another, marching them off towards myself, myself a man who exalts freedom, the thick juice of life, who in trying to live among you can only live by unmasking the mediocrity of my neighbour, his words about the weather, tomorrows shopping, the horror flick on at 9:00 bouncing off me, this pap I send back to him, I turn my other cheek and try to get him to see, see again. Maybe, maybe, maybe But this is the monster I be and why writers are always so dangerous to the powers that be --- they never conform, new they don't produce replicas, unsettling, they urge us all to see the individual within, to abandon the party around the swimming pool, to take off their make-up, their invisible tattoos, to do all this and to live alive, alive in their own light no others, alive in love, settled and sure like a seed that awaits without doubt, its flowering. This no powers that be can afford to let pass uncensored. Censoring it at the top of the food chain as in America or at the roots like in Nigeria or China where writers are taken away at night, reeducated, re-fingered by finger pointing. No, they cannot let this pass but fortunately a writer must die again and again. Yes, fortunately he must let the scream sing out and dispel the quiet darkness. Fortunately, the writer, the real writer writes for no other purpose than to celebrate this divinity of individual possibility and share it in the flesh that was and weans words.

Please excuse the above rant. But I can't be anything but what I am. A few words about the above by that literary light William Gass;

“ So I don't think that it's the message of a work of art that gives it any lasting social value. On the contrary, insisting on this replaces the work with its interpretation, another way of robbing it of its reality. How would you like to be replaced by your medical dossier, your analyst's notes? They take up much less space in the file. The analogy, I think, is precise. The aim of the artist ought to be to bring into the world objects which do not already exist there, and objects which are especially worthy of love.”

Yes, we must write our love on the sky, do what the wind does to cherry trees, champion each and every reality. Free, freely. This is my idea of a New Year. Really.

January 01

Beautiful sunshine to start the new year! RA RA RA ! There is something elemental and true about all those sunworshipping cultures, the Egyptians, the Aztecs, some worldly wisdom hidden in their demize. I went out for an early morning run through the slight frost laid across the Czech hills. My way of starting the year off on the right foot (no pun intended). While running I passed many churches, all old and run down but standing, standing for something nonetheless. A sign of our times. A question popped into my head as always happens when the mind just rests upon the gentle beat, the up and down of the legs, rests and reposes in timeless thought. The question? Why does almost every church have a clock high on its steeple? Is not god, the church timeless -- a place away from the regimental nature of our days, a place for the people? Maybe, but I think that these clocks once represented a godly power, a power to tell the hour. They reflected the churches once bright

eminence as they do now its diseminence and weakness. For hundreds of years the ability to tell "THE TIME" was a secret rite, a power to behold. In the late 15th century, clocks didn't exist --- by the beginning of the 16th they were in all the town centres, a startling development, equivalent to the computer's spread in our own age. Time so faced, changed the face of the world. It was God's gift and the church held it up for all to behold and bow towards. Time was mastered but only through subservience to God. Now though, science has thoroughly undermined the myth, watches on all our wrists, our own so complete awareness of every second of our day all attest to this. So the clocks on these churches sit in ruin, defaced, a time forgotten. Now our road to God is through an abandonment of time, a return to the beginning by way of the end.

It brings to mind an anecdote recounted once by Primo Levi. Retiring at an early age to just write, leaving behind the office hours the endless trudging back and forth from work to the lab --- he thought he'd have reams of time to write, read, study. Yet, it didn't work like that, he worked even less than when he only had Sunday morning to write. His rule? In order to do things, one mustn't have the time. Time he said, " is an eminently compressible material". I agree, time isn't scientifically verifiable, it is what we make it.

I spent New Years Eve, "Sylvestr" as it is known here (because Dec. 31st is Sylvestr's name day) trying to get some sleep amid the constant explosions of fireworks. Unable to, feeling like someone must have in Sarajevo during the first fighting (after that most got used to the blasts, bangs, whistles, shrieks -- man can get used to anything), I flicked on the light and picked up a book from the shelf. My choice? **Night**, by Elie Wiesel, a book I've read many times before, a bible of human despair before the mysteries of God. A slim volume, I got half way through, entranced by the story, reading with a curiosity stemming from disbelief, a disbelief

that this could have happened, that this book could exist. Finally, little Elie and his father reached Auschwitz and witnessed a little child's hanging in the courtyard. Finally I could bear no more and shut my eyes, sleep I sometimes think was invented by man to bear the misery of the world.

Today I awoke and over strong coffee read on about Elie's endless supplings of coffee and soup, endless searches, dreamings of bread. I started reading at the part where celebrating the Jewish New Year, Hannukah, tens of thousands of prisoners despite their despair said the Kadish, prayed, then departing, wished everyone a happy New Year. Yes, our ability to continue, to transform the future today, is truly astonishing. But young Elie would have none of it. Why he says should we pay tribute to God, a God who let's us rot in this hell, a God allowing babies to be thrown to the flames. No, not I .

“ This day I had ceased to plead. I was no longer capable of lamentation. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes were open and I was alone -- terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy. I had ceased to be anything but ashes, yet I felt myself to be stronger than the almighty, to whom my life had been tied for so long. I stood amid that praying congregation, observing it like a stranger.”

Quite powerful words, a powerful scene. Books like this should be necessary reading in our schools. But where are they? Me, I stand too and accuse this bright New Years day, this beginning again. But I do so knowing that like Elie, I will find forgiveness and God again (or will God find me?). In essence, I rage against my own ignorance, my forever ignorance. This is my battle for the new year, not some silly resolution about this or that, but a resolving to come to terms, forgive my self for

the ignorance I have. To become just a man, a small but miracle muddied man. No more, no less.

“ God invented time so everything wouldn’t happen at once.”

January 03

Ah blessed are the eyes! They fell upon the most angelic slice of beauty ever cut from this cake of human creation. The soft, roundish look of a Russian woman’s face always sets me off. Legs rising up to heaven like shoots of bamboo, eyes shining a “knowing”, a strength beyond the body’s boundry. Ah! My eyes should be poked out like those of the architects who created St. Basil’s Cathedral, so they may never more devize such beauty! Russian women, here may lie my last chance to find a woman who can still bring a tear forth, flare a smile, for a line well said. Here there may still be poetry, a natural response to life. Maybe out of their suffering there is a residue and response to poetry, the creation of image, something indelicately human. Maybe. How did I know she was Russian? Simple. Besides their stuffed cheek speech and the men’s adidas track suits and the older women’s usual heavy make-up -- all Russian woman wear hats pulled down over their heads, half veiled they stare out at the world like soft animals from their den on a winter’s day. Yes, the Czech’s wear hats but in a completely different, unelegant, practical way.

Yes, so many Russians are here, as I’ve mentioned. A new type of domination. Most Czech’s always refer to them as “Russian Mafia”, all criminals of one sort or another. I even have an elderly Russian friend who says the same. All I can say is that there must be alot of crime in Russia, and alot of lucrative crime. But I think the answer is more complex. My TV is blaring an old film about Elvis, the tune?

Suspicious minds. This seems to be the correct diagnosis of the Czech mentality. Always suspicious, looking over their shoulders and making a case without facts. The present political crisis with Klaus and his clowns has bleed alot of this. A human quality but quite prevalent here. I can just imagine what they think of me, staggering around town, belting out my truth like a spring time, drousy bear. I can just imagine.

I have been thinking about the future, not a good thing to do. The present is contentious, in flux enough. But yet I can't help it. I think of poor Mozart, dead , dead poor at 35, my age. Is that what awaits me, all greatness? Are we ahead of our times or are our times just lazy, discovering something after the fact because then it is more firm, unmoving, closer to an inert and safer truth, now something to be remembered and not acted upon. Or, are the times just slow, sceptical entities, behind because most are concerned with something completely different than art, the development of the social conscience? I have no answer except to keep doing what I'm doing and speak even if not spoken to/for. Creation lives by a necessity unknown by most men. A necessity realized and made into a freedom, a work of art, an expansion of life. Also, it lives judged not now but forever after. Musil's belief that all good writing must stay away from the glare of "popularity", this den of inequity where once having dipped your pen you are never the same --- is something I wholeheartedly agree with.

But then one must also live, eat and travel, buy beer. So, what should I do? My idea at present is a novel and screenplay, I wrote out a detailed outline this morning. I know that I'm playing with clay idols but maybe even this, I can put a little "art" into. The plot in one sentence; a handsome intern has the rare condition of only wanting to make love with women who are chronically ill, who have just a few months left to give. You can guess the rest, the twists and turns, the sex, the chase, the dilemas.

Something fit for Hollywood, but new, one last bastion of repression not dug up -- sex with the "going to soon be" dead, plus a doctor and patient to boot. On this I'm banking not my talents, only my time. Life, life is a complex affair, there is no innocence anywhere.

January 16

A day of thoughts, the connective tissue of the mind that holds everything together. As I usually do when not working, I was picking through books all morning. Magically my eyes scanned the titles until they fell upon something which connected with the mood within. Strangely, in my reading I came across two different references to Kant's declaration that "Two things fill my mind with ever increasing wonder -- the starry firmament above me and the moral law within me.". A co-incidence but nothing I'm very startled by. It seems that by some divine law, I connect with the word and stumble upon seemingly impossible situations. I remember once reading Skvorecky's *The Engineer or Human Souls* and then going out for a run to "think it through". And who should I see? None other than the man himself. Thinking that I was dreaming, I stopped and watched him to confirm my suspicions. Yes, must be him. A large envelope of something under his arm, quirky hat on his head, anonymous as a leaf on a tree. But I'd seen him and recognized him by some divine law, amid the other six million possibilities in that city of frothing hope, Toronto. Strange but true. I wrote a poem about it and sent it to him and received a nice compliment regarding it. And how did I find his address? No, I didn't follow him, I simply looked him up in the phone book, remembering him saying in the novel how he always left his name in the phone book even though it happened that many secret service men invariably called claiming to be an old friend of an old friend. Life is stranger than fiction, if only we have the courage to feed it enough feeling, use our senses and mind to the precipice of their

possibilities.

“ I invoke no inspiration except that element of chance, which is common to every mind: then comes an unremitting toil which wars against this element of chance.”

Paul Valery, *Analects*

I couldn't resist and had to scout through my shelf for Kant's *Theory of the Heavens*. I agree with his Blakian awe and perception but would have to add a third category of wonder. He includes the infinite outside, the skies and the infinite inside, where the heart lies but I would also claim the middle ground where act and idea weave around. Here rises up that question, why does man live when he knows he is going to die? I am amazed, wonder struck at how man can fool himself in such ways, how he can fill his days when he knows they all pass away. It is a wonder how he reconciles mind and matter and in his sleight of hand allows life to play, the game to continue. A wonder I wonder at every day. How man can balance between these two infinities and be, not be crushed by their "infirmity", their lack of permanence, stability. That man can reconcile the mind and consciousness with the world outside and like a tree clinging to a ledge live, seems a wonder to me. Every day a gift in this respect, I wonder at just being here, breathing, being me.

“ The greatest mystery is not that we have been flung at random between the profusion of the earth and the galaxy of the stars, but that in this prison we can fashion images of ourselves sufficiently powerful to deny our nothingness.”

Andre Malraux

People live so filled with need, an unnecessary need that they delude themselves with. A need wed to the particular, to be touched and kissed in particular ways, to be chained to beds and barked at, to sit in bars and look just so-so, to put their right shoe on before the left, to have someone call them on the phone. We are all but children, fearful children pretending to be strong, unwanting of others. Oh, if only this need, this need of "getting off" could be shone from our bellies and fill the skies,

beacons of light tracing our vulnerability! What a show it would be. It seems only saints and prostitutes have gone beyond the particular into a full love, into the realm of doing for others selflessly; being able to do so because they have moved beyond discrimination, to the prostitute everyone is beauty full, to the saint all people are divine, precious. The rest of us dimly exist in the realm of need, perverse need, little children crying because they couldn't have a sucker -- but crying out quietly, twisted by this pain of want, and a greater pain called shame.

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Pining for a love today, needing to reconcile what could and what can't be. A great pit of pain, necessity unrealized knotting within me. I scream, I drink, I lie for hours and don't move, I swirl poems through my head, I curse the world my bed. Nothing helps, the ache continues, the absense, the absece grows. What to do? As Leopardi put it, " everything is arcane but our pain." I think of Yeat's most enduring, endearing lines, about his Maud Gonne

"..... that most fecund ditch of all,
 The folly that man does
 Or must suffer, if he woos
 A proud woman not kindred of his soul."

I think about them and know there is naught to do but live and find ways to mitigate the pain, to wash away the anger.....

" Why should I blame her that she filled my days
 With misery, or that she would of late
 Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways ..."

Yes Maud is gone. Life must be lived without remorse, a looking back in anger, nor self pity. Endurance is the only ally of the sensitive man "our souls are love, and a continual farewell."

Love and secondly Art are the only two things I now can live by and through. All else seems such a waste, a filling of time, a postponement. Why? My guess is that in Art and Love a necessity, an eventuality is implied, evident. All things within their allure and grasp are filled with meaning and importance, they lead on to "something", there is a purpose which isn't here in the pooped out every day world of work and whining. In life, this moment, what if I don't finish writing this, what if I wipe my nose or instead take a bath or pick at my sores. It doesn't really matter, something always happens, there is no end to tie it all together unless we delude ourselves and create some artificial paradigm, a deluded self-reference. But that is not my way. In Art and more so in Love, all is meant, divine. If my character takes a piss along the street, it is because he has to, because the story demands it, the reader, the universal reader demands it. All action or as in poetry, all words, are necessary, just as they should be. Art to me lends an arena where I can step out of the haphazard and temporary air of life and create a logic universe of light or dark, whatever it doesn't matter -- only that it be a self-contained universe, with explanation, with reference and end. Not a self-evident end but an end nonetheless in the heart and mind of the reader. Life, life is a quiet fart that's all. Art and Life swell the individual by creating a world of it's own, the individual's own. Without this consciousness is but a thing devouring deserts and forests, making shiny, fast cars, a technological treadmill where man stumbles upon denied. Where all is a lie because there is no end, no certainty, no place where the centre holds. And who wants that?

“ What calls me is that lifted, rough-tongued bell
 (Art, if you like) whose individual sound
 insists I too am individual.
 It speaks: I hear: others may hear as well,”

Philip Larkin, **Reasons for Attendance.**

January 24

There is a television program on Czech TV wholly dedicated to poetry! Wonders of wonders, is the media now getting the message??!! It is called “**Cizi slovo Poesie**” or roughly translated, “The strange words of poetry”. A man wanders the streets of Prague and asks others to quote any poetry they remember or can come up with. Quite a few laughs as people try to remember, people who can't remember the words because there is no music for them, lots of stops and gaffs. Short spurts of memory, “if music be the food of love.....then”. But at least it's on TV, words conferring and giving meaning to work a day, love away days. The catch is that it lasts barely 5 minutes and is broadcast once a week. I'd like to know if this is a programming decision or rather the a reflection of the dirth of poetic consciousness, the ability to find enough people interesting in discussing poetry, interested in making it? Either way we are poorer for it.

But still I must smile. I can't see poetry being anything but a personal affair; not a competition or a sport, nor a TV program or entertainment, not even a public affair or glorification. Rather, only the revelation that comes to one who listens and re-invents the sound and in its meaning is found. That's all. It's like sex, best between two and when talked, attempted, simulated in other ways; through communal discourse (propoganda), gossip or popularization --- the meaning and spirit is sucked away.

Why is it that most poets would be hard pressed to quote even two or three lines of their verse (while critics might be able to sprout verses full.)? Me too, I lack the ability to remember, to regurgitate like a bird swallowing the song. Maybe it stems from the fact that in the vocation of the poetry resides the necessity of getting on, moving along. A poet must not hang on the past, must forget old accomplishments, the next poem is always foremost in the mental apparatus.

Or perhaps this is just a symptom of our educational system? I really think it's a combination. Lately I have been having trouble with my poetry mainly from the fact (discounting the fact that "the lyfe so shrt , the crft so hrdt to learn" and also that time and work impinge) that I keep thinking about a previous poem, not being able to bury it, push it aside, kill it. A beautiful poem, a keeper, great if I may say so. So I've been saying to myself, "Why write more, immortality is here". But yet the itch rises up. So I'm struggling, looking back and then forward. I must learn to forget, once more sing, not regurgitate. I, like Howard Nemerov in his poem "**To Lu Chi**" acknowledge these dilemmas and delights, the disappointments too, embedded in the poet and which he climbs through towards the poem, the unfinished fire;

" Through many centuries of dust, to which
 We both belong, your quiet voice is clear
 About the difficulties and delights
 Of writing well, which are, it seems, always
 The same and generally unfashionable."

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January 28

A miracle, the word has come again in all it's compressed and horrific visionary sense! Just when you think the well is dry, the rain clouds appear and open up,

giving their life, their sustenance. I was walking down the street after a hard day of teaching, heading home to some pasta and red wine when the following came thundering out of nowhere;

They know well
 how the grey river grieves
 for those thrown in
 held firm among her weeds.

This happens quite often but I usually just move along, continue letting the verses, the rhymes, the mysterious utterances frolick inside. Yet here I felt a firm power, a gravity, a need. What was it? I don't know nor could I venture a guess except that the mysterious process of life, how it unfolds and embraces fate, was operating. I muttered the lines over and over again until I got home. They remained. Then out of know-where came the reason behind the words. I'd been reading a lot of, re-discovering the joyous words of Philip Larkin lately. He, like myself, believes in waiting, having patience for the words to arrive, want to stick and stay alive. He like myself has a unconscious sense of rhythm, a delight in the sound of words, the music of meaning. He like myself was conscious of the need for a poem to "be about something", to bring meaning in the backdoor. Take for example the following from his immortal (but in my opinion not nearly his best), **Lines on a Young Lady's Photography Album**,

The gap from eye to page. So I am left
 To mourn (without a chance of consequence)
 You, balanced on a bike against a fence;
 To wonder if you'd spot the theft
 Of this one of you bathing; to condense,

In short, a past that no one now can share,
 No matter whose your future; calm and dry,
 It holds you like a heaven, and you lie
 Unvariably lovely there,
 Smaller and clearer as the years go by.

I'll let the words speak for themselves, the technical merit, the inspiration, the

unique blend of modern and traditional, the meaning so full in the saying, the sound, above all the rhythm, what I like to call "the ride". Been thinking of Larkin lately, touched by what we both believed, sharing something soft through the eye of time's needle. I'd been thinking of a poem to him, thinking and getting nowhere and then now like Einstein on the trolley car, my $E=MC^2$. Looking closer I saw the logic in the words, how effected I was by his book *The Less Deceived*, knowing how less deceived he was. So the title was there, *The Less Deceived* and the words echoing how deep the less deceived see, how they know the secret of the river, the endless flowing river.

But what I was most startled by when I looked at this whole process was HOW DID I WRITE THIS POEM THEN ADD THE TITLE, YET THEY FIT PERFECTLY (GRIEVED/DECEIVED)? What process was at work here, what dream time logic was scratching, shifting within? Yes, the unconscious has a logic of it's own, the reason of the heart that the mind knows not. Thinking of Larkin, I'd somehow set a process in play that functioned without my knowledge or awareness. This is the rub, what power within, what wonders in mind for the man who would only use it! Now I'm once again not looking back, unchained I feel my destiny, the FACT of the poet I am, that I must embrace this or be overwhelmed by these words that are always sprouting. You can't fight who you are -- this much I know.

" The swan sings
in sleep
on the lake of the mind."

The Silver Swan, An epitaph, Kenneth Rexoth

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interviews with "Poets At Work". I was reading the interview with James Dickey when I stumbled upon his opinion of Philip Larkin. He says, " Oh, my Lord. Philip Larkin is a small kind of "vers de societe" writer. He's one of those Englishmen of the welfare state who write self-effacing poems about how much he hates his record collection.....Larkin's all right; he's pleasant and kind of low-key -- but that's all.....Larkin can't say anything amazing." Now, I respect Dickey for many reasons, namely his opinionated bravado and nose in your face bravado. But I think his judgement reflects the fact, as he commented early in the interview, that "your opinion of your work (or another's work -- my italics) fluctuates wildly." Poetry bears no constancy, one moment you look at something and it is trite, garbage -- the next moment immortal and singing. This is both the poem's strength and weakness. How it can seep into the blood stream and make nothing happen, yet move a man inside, deeply and hidden. Dickey I believe missed the hidden rhythm in Larkin, this is his point and how he says something amazing, not directly by words or statement but by words, bound as he is by the beauty. Dickey's assessment of Roethke as "the Greatest Poet" is abit much, poetry isn't a "beauty contest", or a wish born of an applause metre --- but his opinion rests on firm and unmoving ground. Roethke is great because he understood (and wrote with this "in mind") the primacy of words conveying meaning not only through a reference to a symbol or a sign, a naming but also (and primarily) through sound, rhythm. This is what Dickey can't see in Larkin but why I like him (at this moment). In his Some Remarks on Rhythm, Roethke re-interates that variation in rhythm is "a clue to everything it all depends on the pause, the natural pause.....the breathe unit, the language that is natural to the immediate thing" I miss this in Dickey's poetry but find it in Larkin, but then again, tomorrow I might see it in Dickey, like one suddenly catches the "jist" of a tune. such is the particular magic of the poem, "the line well wrot". It is for the poet to discover the psychic force of thought and being and to allow this both universal and individual wavelength of all to live for a moment

between two lost souls. Poetry in essence, a muscular birdsong.

January 31

“So alone am I, my body is a floating weed severed at the roots.”

Kokinshu, **A Japanese Poem.**

Yes, feeling very temporary, like I'm stuck in a film, everything repeating itself, me, the actor turning to the others on the train and saying, “Why don't we ever arrive?”. I'm a dog always just dreaming of the bone. A man who seeing meaning everywhere, then begins to ask where this meaning flows from, then followsthe film spinning and flapping on the reel, the real

If one were a doctor diagnosing the ills of the twentieth century, loneliness would rank as our number 1 ailment, we are divorced from the real, floating, drifting through the months, grabbing onto any kind of event -- in search of distraction. There is an estrangement from the self, a failure to communicate within. This translates in our false hope that “others” will relieve us of our pain, this gnawing of our soul, the friction as it rubs against itself. It is at bottom a failure to find meaning, to infuse the symbols of normal life with life and essence --- its symptoms include everything from drug abuse to personality worship, fashion to warfare, TV lethargia to consumerism and the belief in things in and of themselves (possessing) and not their meaning, what they represent.

The great figure of Willy Lowman would seem to be the crowning figure of this past century. As Miller himself said, “What the name really meant to me was a terror-stricken man calling into the void for help that will never come.”. We ache with an itch which we don't know how to scratch. Like Willy we sell our souls just to endure,

avoid the confrontation with solitude. The Here and Now melts away before us and we fail to find solace within ourselves, to be individual and strong. We all like Willy cower before this collosis, this void of Time before us. We all become the pathetic image of a man who has sold his soul but hasn't even gained an inch of the world.

But yet, there is another loneliness that is more vast and striking. It is a solitude which comes when all meaning has been praised, after all the boats have parted for the sea. It is an emptiness, a true death of the self. I have gone beyond the "alienation" most men experience. Unneedy, living only now, there is a great silence in my being, divorced as I've become from others here in this land of exile. It is a barren, compressed whole, the vision and appearance of Krishna to Arjuna, that can't be covered up, avoided. Some must bear witness to this horrific thing. It is the loneliness of Razumov in Conrad's, **Under Western Skies**,

"Who knows what true loneliness is - not the conventional word, but the naked terror? to the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion. Now and then a fatal conjunction of events may lift the veil for an instant. For an instant only. No human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad."

This morning, this cold morning chilled by a Russian wind, I feel that "emptiness", the madness which Conrad alludes to. But I only sense it, my spoon hasn't yet dipped into it. I am learning to endure and remake myself here, so to come out the other end. We must all confront this angel within, be squeezed between the silences and in this way renew life, real life. Some must shock that child within or the fear of solitude, the slavery to its presence, pressure will persist. Yes, it is at the risk of madness, a Nietzschean madness that we re-make the world. I am trying, bearing as well as I can this knowledge. Swimming thus, I am looking for the light and new air through the dark waters which press at me.

“ I have gradually seen the light as to the most universal deficiency in our kind of cultivation and education: no one learns , no one strives after, no one teaches -- the endurance of solitude.”

On Education, Fredrich Nietzsche

This is the task of all true poets, to endure, to last before our individuality. Patient we wait to reconcile man with men, momentary life with always, the umbrella and the operating table. Every poem a search for a way out, a day break, an effort to live again, to gain an inch on death. This is why every poem no matter how dark contains the essence of joy, an eternal joy born of struggle, the true struggle of hope against hope.

But the poem is a shared joy. What I love best about poetry is that it does not exist unless the reader brings a certain level of intelligence to its reading. There is no free ride, you too must have a piece of the original spirit and vitality by which it was written, inside you. Perhaps this is why poetry is so often tried (so unsuccessfully) and so little read these days. Barren and without the requisite tools or gifts, we are lost amid the music of words. Nothing is heard, the radio is filled with static. Poetry like any good art is about reconciliation, a grand joining of disparate forces. This is why the poet must embrace so much, why a poet doesn't just "do" poetry but must live it, endure its tests.

“You will find poetry nowhere unless you bring some of it with you.”

-- Joseph Joubert

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I'm sitting here looking out the window, trying to keep the poems from popping out of my head -- a jack in the box, in your face to the world. I'm sitting here looking out the window on the stretch of a river, the bridge streaming with working people heading to their jobs, their "other" nests, while the river dark and grey, knowing rages on and on.

I feel like Kierkegaard, sitting and gazing in wonder at all the others, lighting cigar after cigar, pondering the question as a man would grab another's jugular, thinking over the question of "what to do with one's life?", while all the others so occupied with making the world a better place, hustle by. Feel like Kierkegaard, my job is to wake up the world, if others are all busy making things easier, I must make it harder, throw soup into their face, let them through resistance, suffer again and then know life anew.

If you look at the world closely, you see how organized everyone is, how hypnotized we all are by progress or more exactly "ease". Doctors ease suffering, bankers ease our debts, cars ease our need to "be there", a worker in a glass factory eases our guilt, allowing us to buy a splendid gift for someone. All occupations make things easier --- it is for the poet, the prophet to sniff out the problem here and throw a little glass on to the road of progress.

This century of technological splendour (and too, stupification) has allowed so much to just happen. It has taken the bit out of our mouths and allowed us to graze in the fields of plenty. At least Western man has it "easy" (except for the 40 hours a week of "having to work", of being trained, educated in the ways of a good slave (read citizen)), he lives long, he feels less pain, he has the chance to enjoy himself so much more. But who to tell us the cost, who to awake us from this "unliving"? I say unliving because a man is only alive in so much as he thinks his world, only so

much as he moulds meaning. This is only accomplished through purpose, travail, resistance, the pushing the boulder up the hill. In this land of "ease", we are like old Midas who would have died through his splendid riches, his tongue, his touch, turning even food to gold. As a poet I see my true vocation; if the world spoils for ease, then I will his my song of truth in their deafening ear. If I wake but one it will be enough to save the world. Like Kierkegaard I chose the path of most resistance, even if it means forsaking my own Regina, to be mocked on the streets and spat on. This is the road of those who sense what is fated, who live not to live less but more, who see man as a means to an end, not as one who follows, who merely endures. Anyone can endure the torturers table and designs, but it is the great man who makes something of this afterward.

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February 18

The Czech Republic will play Canada in the men's Olympic hockey semi-final. A win-win situation on my part. I can't help but twinge at my own nationalism, this inherited and blindly learnt characteristic that is so hard to shrug off. Despite all the rhetoric otherwise, the scary, stern head of nationalism, patriotism, mass hypnosis, is more than ever alive in the world we live in today. All declarations otherwise fail to see how the world really is, fail to see how the signs and symbols of culture can't just be erased overnight, swept into the corner like old hair.

Yes, I have this nostalgic feeling of immersion into another that my being "Canadian" gives me at moments like these, when we dive into the dissolving liquid of nationalism. But yet as a poet I've clawed my way up for air, if poetry is anything it is this freedom, the air of free thought, of bare naked individualism, of life standing

alone, blessed in its sacred difference. It has been a hard road, a forsaken road without reward --- there can be no compromise, no kissing ass, no odes to famous fallen heroes or stoggy emperors. No, nothing but the necessity of being, imbued and brought alive in the word.

Poets unfortunately don't score very much higher when it comes to cowtowing to the latest fashion, the latest power, the pregnant pull of a nation's, a country's gravity. Recently one can think of Petroffi puffing away, beautiful but bolemic also. Or then again Rupert Brooke or Yeats, geniuses yes but also sentimental whiners when it came to the nation state. And what of all the Communist blowhorns, Mayakovsky, Blok, Eluard and on and on. It seems that from time immemorial the poet has been a "courtier", a played and payed performer who sang for his supper. Think of Ronsard the old bard. Plato would have been pleased to have them in his Republic. yet he also knew better (as did Stalin). Only in the last 200 hundred years or so have poets been able to afford to be poor and forgotten and released from servitude into sub**versiveness**. But this is but part of the story, a few have had the will to endure, to not sell out and to wait patiently for something human, "really human" to be said. Many others have played both parts, slept in two beds, kept a muse as well as a worldly mistress.

Today the situation is much more difficult for the poet. He or she has more apparant freedom but at the same time a new master, a plunge into exile and estrangement from society. Think of Ginsberg. one would say he was anything but a puppet. But his poetry was so simple, mostly the same, a trite " today the mail came / the warheads gleaming in the distance look like nails / today the boy died and another man is eating lunch / in a cafeteria government funded..... da da da da It is just as easy to be anti nationalistic as nationalistic, just as easy to be for as against ---- the trick is to find what always must be.

Perhaps that is why I've always liked the few Chinese poets I've found in translation (and Basho also). They reek a timeless simplicity, a profound individual acknowledgement of the dilemmas and joy we all confront and embrace every day. But yet they too have sung great pleasantries and benedictions in the name of his holiest of holies. Yet something special endures, a seeing into the essence that most Western poets have passed by, crying over as so many do, their belly-aching cat.

Poetry is the other immersion that nationalism, historical vanity cannot upend or destroy. It is the immersion into the timeless as opposed to the time full, into the always as opposed to the temporary. This was why Plato was so fearful of its subversive nature, for poetry served no one, it only served all. And to serve all was against the realm of power, pompetry, busts and braggadaccio. Poetry the individuals immersion into the sacred, a mature and breathless beyond.

Nationalism but an infantile search for the womb, a forgetting and absolution of individuality. In essence nationalism is a fake, a false road to "the other", this accounts for all the evil done in its name. There is no road back to the warm waters of the womb, no arms of a mother once more for us. There is only the beyond, the road to an understanding of everything, the horrific power and gift of life, pure and divorced from the ego, the ego that nationalism keeps forcefeeding and in doing so, stunting the individuals growth toward freedom.

March 01

Today I did nothing but lie about in an armchair, thinking, thinking, drawing on the smoke of memory and the connective tissue of ideas. I'd had alot of plans but sometimes something overtakes me, climbs on my back and won't let me up. I'm like a drunk before his tin cup, there's no pulling me away. The day is just lost to

this world, so to be more in that other world of feeling, where the moment rests still and doesn't just pass on to the next item on the shopping list.

I've lost weeks like this before -- stunned by the power of the mind as I am. No pen, no activity, just the sweet drunkenness of being possessed and unaware of the rhythm of society's agenda, the being here and doing that (all to just do it over again). But I digress, it isn't that I'm not aware of the normal world, I am, but it is more like I just ignore it and drift along to the other song of thought, the minds inebriation and colour. I smell the flowers strong, pushed up by sun and shit behind out old run down barn, snakes scuttling among the Labrador tea after hot naps on the rocks silky curve. I hear a girl laughing in the distance and feel the firmness of the ink blue sky -- more solid than any sky I can just SEE. I am overcome by memory and play between its folds until its time for coffee or to phone about the broken stove.

If the poet is anything special, he or she is special in that they re-create, nay, make anew, the minds refuse and dusty archive. Things lived in this way are more real, the world stops more often in splendour and terror than with other mortals. Things slow and gain meaning. A poet grows old before the body foretold. Grows old and gains the clarity that the weight of remembrance brings. A poem is but one way a person deals with the strange phenomena of the mind. Exile, the distance which allows one to see clearly, just compounds and compresses the process. The mind expands and embraces the past, the body of ideas. The poet offers a glimpse of this real world, so strong and clear, so necessary and true to the rest of us. Perhaps death then is only the cumulative weight of memory re-lived, dealt with and put aside. Is this what it means to "see your life flash before your eyes"? Why does age allow us to see the past so clearly, why must we? Is then heaven only "forgetfulness", a living outside of the mind and remembering -- life but just a

remembering, so long as the flame lasts? And I ask as Ben Franklin did so long ago, "where is the memory when it is not being remembered", is it then being lived?

March 05

A run in the cold rain. It always reminds me of the human ability to survive the "mind", live through the cold and damp of life. A dreary day only an opportunity to meet the challenge which is living, bearing warmth despite the cold always closing in.

Outside my apartment, a young girl, hair matted by the rain, strode awkwardly on her platform shoes up the bridge, back to her small village in the hills. Her hair was a blaze of orange, red and brown, cropped short and pulled and twisted behind her delicate ears. She had on blueish shaded, John Lennon sunglasses and bobby pins in her hair. She seemed to walk through the air in her black bellbottoms and hooded jacket. A statement as the current lexicology goes. Me, I just watched in wonder, marvelled as always by the isght of a young woman "trying to be", possessing what I can only say is the "edge", a knowledge of the possibility in existence. Like an unstable calf just pushed out into life, a teenage girl seems to look out upon the world with big eyes, a newness --- seems to straddle the point between existence and essence or idea, seems to live in her outcast ways. i've always marvelled at these made up, so untamed and underneath so innocent young women. I sense their urgent needs and how the world is just "what will happen tonight", I sense their insecurity cloaked in their trying to be fashionable and make a statement ways. I sense all this and I'm amazed at how they confront life as it should be -- with all the awe and reverence one can muster, with all the knowledge of possibility inherent in the intermingling of souls.

A young woman looks out at the world much like the poet. A poet is forever an adolescent, more woman than man. Insecure but with a chin forward ready to take the pelting of life, existing. Insecure in a positive sense, unsure of tomorrow but wondering about it, ready to encounter all possible happenings. This is the "edge" where the young gangly woman and the forever awkward poet meet.

A poet is forever fighting the deluge, the demand of decency and learning the proper way to wear make-up or walk. He or she is always filled with the adolescent's secret knowledge that tomorrow is insecure, a maybe. A poet forsakes the life of blinders and trite custom and habit accepted as living, the life of the harness and predictable plow. The poet is like this young woman, that's all I know. Either that or an old man who still unknowing, leans on memory and re-makes, who in the shadow of death is once again too, free to be anything, to relish the gift of life and the magical confluence of events. This too, but never the between, the solid world of workaday predictability, tamed and told knowing. The poet is an insecure and unstable material practiced in the art of movement. And damn the world that would make this young woman's eyes glaze over and her love freeze into marriage and subservience. I say let this insecurity always sing lovely and beautiful as it is, like this girl walking up the bridge in the cold rain back to her village and room full of posters. Back to more dreams of tomorrow and more aching want to have this dream today.

March 10th

A morning of poems, mysterious words and images streaming through and pushing aside the plans of today. Trying to do the dishes, read the newspaper, get a letter written -- no luck. Words, verses of truth, of unknown origin sprung up like small flowers to surprise the person walking by.

The brain was working overtime, disgorging its dross and dextrous. But what was happening inside, what was the purpose of this incubation whose heat now gave birth to the eggs of thought? At bottom, the poet I think, is trying to say only one thing though it may arrive in so many different forms, sounds, stories, stammerings. This is just the window dressing, the window dressing which these activities coats its actions with. A poet is the man at the carnival who amid the revellery, "le spectacle", gun in hand, tries to hit the middle of the paper star. But try as he might, he can always get closer to the middle, the one, Lao-tze's point about which all wheels turn. In essence the poet is engaged in sacred work, a search for the point where all is brought together and is both the end and the beginning, the place outside historical time. All poems, whatever their subject are engaged in this embracing activity, this religious search for that which endures always. Also, precisely because of its metaphysical genesis (and here I'm not talking about "metaphysical poetry" but all poetry as a search and thinking activity of a human being), poetry will always be needed by man, will last and continues to be, despite the temporal flash of TV, radio, mass media, fashion and "entertainment". In this, I rest assured.

So, why must the poet continually re-create anew? Why isn't one poem sufficient for us all? why must the same thing be said again and again in so many ways? I don't think it is just time and the fact that the poet must continually re-interpret things for his or her age that makes this happen, be necessary. Not only this but also that existence as opposed to the "one", the still point of this turning earth, must be intimately wrapped up in creation, that life itself is based upon this creative measure, this continual re-making of the original instant, constant search for completion. We exist because of these efforts -- poetry makes nothing happen, so it makes everything happen (read - exist). As Lao-Tze also said,

“ the purpose of a rabbit snare is to catch rabbits. When the rabbits are caught, the snare is forgotten.

The purpose of words is to convey ideas. When the ideas are grasped, the words are forgotten.

Where can I find a man who has forgotten words? He is the one I would like to talk to.”

Is poetry a forgetting of words to re-make the world through more words? Like the forgetful nature by which the poems ushered through me this morning? Or does Chuang Tzu mean that we should abandon words and that the greatest poem or idea is to act, to reach the end of the surrealist agenda where poetry has merged and been swallowed by life? Which? I'm not sure but I do know that the nature of poetry, its diversity somehow holds the possibility of both. Another Chinese goody by Chaung Tzu,

Water is for fish
And air for me,
Natures differ, and needs with them.

Hence the wise men of old
Did not lay down
One measure for all.

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Thoughts streaming through me all day, a kind of possession. Not the possession of the modern world, a maddened fixation with “things” but a sense of being possessed by something “other”, thought its outcome, the remains of the struggle. Every true poet knows this feeling of being possessed, of walking along and being filled with song, thoughts, words popping in the head like popcorn in the pot. Where do they come from, he says? He feels they are not his own, he is but the vessel, the container, the medium.

But we think and celebrate the words, the result of this process. My own feeling is that we have it backwards as always. We clap for what is visible when the real miracle and gem is hidden inside. A poet always works alone, words are only the waste of thought, its dextrous and shit. The real and blessed event is the thinking, the bowel movement that processes and pushes out the words, the secret of being. Who will be our Christopher Columbus of thought, the voyager into these depths of all possibility?

Yes, the poet is undervalued (but in a sublime and backside way overvalued, revered) precisely because his work is invisible. So much happens for which there is no visible fact, result. Just a few words, poor words, little axe marks in the forest of symbols. Hard to discern, too faint to follow. And always, the forest grows up and covers them as fast as they are knotted. But although we don't see the man with the axe, though we don't see how the food of life was digested and shat out, sometimes, someone finds their way in the forest or a beautiful flower is fertilized. This is the only redemption given, the only compensation for the hidden act of thought. In some very incredible way, the poet symbolizes how the world is thought into being, dreamt so that it may be lived. What then we see but a small part of all possible worlds. We are mistaken if we think otherwise, that there is but this "one" world. Our instincts should lead us elsewhere, the prejudice of the eye should have warned us long ago.

March 29

A day of turning back the clocks, setting the world aright. I spent a good half an hour setting all mine, accomodating that fuzzy, general word "society" and at the same time feeling that now things were in order and ludicrously before, they weren't. Yes, what folly is man. Today it is 8:00, yesterday 7:00. Much like most things in the

kingdom of men, society. What we call evil at 2:00 is often good at 8:00, happiness at 5:00 is almost always boredom at 11:00. Fickle creatures we are, fortunately we don't know it.

I spent a lot of time avoiding "writing", sitting down and confronting myself, the universal possibilities of words. Each letter tap a hesitation before the venture somewhere else. A form of play, but a serious form of play. Bohumil Hrabal, the Czech pubophile and lumberjack of a writer said it so often, that, " the hardest thing about writing is finding a reason to write." I whole heartedly agree. In a way it is like life, a thing we are thrust into without our consent, a predestination. We would like to be him but we had no choice in the matter, we are who we are. We couldn't chose to be a mujhaddeen or a Bolivian tin miner or a fish. We had no say. Nor could we intervene and change time, be born earlier rather than later, a 12th century Mongol rather than a 20th technocrat. No, the game is rigged. All is decided and free will just an illusion, a play toy put in front of us to pacify and allow us to mindlessly be/become what was already decided. So, I say, why do anything in the face of this honest determinism. Honestly, because our job is to live and create, to allow the flower who we are to sway in the wind -- not to play God or change the world as so many try. The people to be most scared about are those who'd like to change the world rather than just live it.

So I write when I can. When I don't I don't. It is as simple as that. I try to concern myself with the how rather than the elusive why (though the question keeps haunting me, tempting me). We are part of something larger and must live it out. but to a certain extent as I've said before, good writers are born not made. Quality is the crucible. Good writers I think are all aware of this dilemma of why write?, precisely because they see in front of them, the green and grace of life. Living should be enough. So why isn't it. I've no answer but this is an interesting question, a Van

Morrison lament, "why, why, why / why do I have to explain.". But we do and some writing gets done, yet life and living, it's necessity, vitality, pressure and abundance swell within the writer and make it hard for him or her to just sit and write (that is unless he or she is a trite work a day writer, the kind that I have little use for. What they wrote at 6:00 will be forgotten, digested by 6:30). There is a surrealist in every good writer, maybe not in technique but in spirit, this desire to meld art and life. To make a creation of living, to somehow get around the falsity that is art as compared to life.

But a good writer can never go wrong, even in procrastination. For the spirit interned will inevitably show itself, pay dividends. Patience yes, patience is a virtue. Two writers who I can't bear said two things which I truly believe. Coleridge said that every good writer must have a little of the philosopher in him. Be a thinker, a daydreamer, a man for who ideas are important. The other was Frost who said that " every poet has to read, read, read and read." , to paraphrase him. So today I was lost in thought and reading. Reading and soaking in the sounds so someday that poem will flower from the fertilizer I feed on now.

Yes, it is a strange paradox that the writer who is the great "celebrant" of unfettered and let loose life, is at the same time one who is most removed from life. He or she lives on its margins, its hinterlands. In order to celebrate life, he or she must remove themselves from its grasp. It is as if the world's greatest lover were a braggard, one who only talked about it. A strange paradox.

Yet, most writers also have the acute awareness of the trivial in life, a shriek of "What, mere life!??". They look out the window and see only suffering, only boredom, only the drum roll of sameness, a yawning hole. The imagination beckons, thought smells like a lover and calls from the unreal covers of the bed.

The temptation is too great and we climb on into the word and away from the silence of living. The writer is a steppenwolf, a half animal (life) and a half man (writing, the dream, thought) who is caught and torn between the two. Society wants to paradoxically tame the man, the freedom of the mind, so he may live and be. Is this too why it has been said that most poets are murdered in school? Eliot warned us never to let life get in the way of living. Does it?

Is that what happened to Rimbaud? Torn in his youthful sensibility, he suddenly realized the truth of the matter, that life is to be lived in a bellowing way. Writing only a distraction -- for those afraid to live, practice what they preach? I don't think so. I prefer Balzac's stund disbelief and confusion when asked the question as to what literature was. He replied to George Sand, so it's been said, " Literature! but my dear lady, literature doesn't exist! There is life, of which politics and art are part. I am a man who's alive that's all.....a man living his life, nothing more." The merger of life and dream, the genius to NOT see difference, seperation. The genius to walk right through, to live.

A poem I wrote yesterday. An offering in the name of the above, the wind off a dove from some other flood's wing.

The poem is a dream

but a dream

we know why

O, if only

we could climb

so high!

See the dream

as it was

120

meant to be

there and then free

our being a poem

drunk like leaves left

in a cup of tea

A screech outside my window. I turn to my right and look out the window into the street below. A mother is running up the street and below me (yet so far and too so close), her small daughter cries out in excitement. They embrace and their dog barks and bounds around them. A common enough scene. But somehow it is too much for me, so packed full of life. My head fills with this crazed joy of being alive, feeling this moment, understanding what I do. Life impinges on writing and cries out its significance, its short lived gasp. I am now turning off the machine and send my thanks to the strangers, my friends in life below. I can write another day.

“As for living, our servants can do that for us.”

--- Axel, Villiers de L'Isle Adams

(meaning LIFE is most important. Living as most do, is just existing and failing to be filled with life's force. Unprepared as most are for the long littleness of life (Auden). A poor excuse.)

“ We think and name in one world, we live and feel in another.”

--Marcel Proust

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April 03

I'm having trouble writing, untying the knot between living and art. So until the great

wind rises up again to breathe, I offer a few morsels from my philosophy note books. They shed a little light on this problem, the insolvability of this problem, why the writer is half heaven and half earth -- half god and half man. Why the basic problem of all life, of man and his gift of consciousness is precisely one of this world and incompleteness or the search for another and completion. A paradigm that covers the lot of it, the lot we are.

THIS IS THE PROBLEM.

We are all vis a vis our consciousness, our knowledge of not ourselves but of cause and effect, trapped. We are in a prison or if you will, a gigantic circus tent.

Admission was free, there was only the need to fill the seats so the event would seem a success. but after some laughter and excited thrills some of us want out, to be whole -- while the majority deems this to suffice as life, that it is enough.

We are imprisoned because we sense we are not whole. This is the price of existence - incompleteness, a fallenness, a distance from the all. Yes, we are like flakes of marble struck off the sculpture scattered on the unending floor of time. We search for this sculpture. But all we know are others, the sculpture is too big, only sometimes, sometimes the cold of its shadow is felt. Or does this work of art still exist? Perhaps there is no more marble to chip from? Are we then truly free but don't know it? Is our sense of non-freedom, incompleteness false, a feeling left over from the original cutting but which now has no validity, seeing that we cannot return? Does this mean we are then never able to be complete, cursed to be fragmentary, to know not whence and why we came? Are we like children whose mother was never really born? We can't achieve a return but we are returning nonetheless.

All problems, all studies, are sprouts emanating from this trunk - the paradox of

existence, that to exist we must then be divorced from life. Perhaps death is the best life, if we take this paradox as true? The womb has been sealed up, that we are alone is the only certainty. That happiness is truly never feeling the sculpture's shadow (as in it being the feeling like that of a man who in losing his leg still feels the appendage, shadow pain), is another partial truth. Belief, the opium that gave so many so much is now impossible, the sky has been wiped clean, this direction isn't any longer possible, the modern mind moves in us all and haunts like a scorned prince in his castle.

What next? What is to be done now? What are the next branches we must climb up? Death? The dream? Consciousness sunk into itself? I ask like my beloved Andre Breton, "Who will be the Christopher Columbus of forgetfulness?" and in forgetting, lead us beyond the memory of the sculpture's shadow into love, a freedom which prohibits choice and embraces fate. Who?

In essence, this is but the poet's problem to which I speak (and I mean not only poets in the functional sense, those who write poems but also those few in the teleological sense, those few souls for who art is life, the poem alive, pain every step they dance, those for who something is amiss, that the world just doesn't feel right.). The poet sets aflight, to write. He sees the world spread out below in great detail. He begins to rub out the edges that obscure and entrap. Yet as he does this, there arises an incredible longing to be part of things, to exist as men should, on the ground, shovel and wine glass in hand, with the day ahead of him.. But the edges keep being rubbed out, he is killing and eating away himself. The poet is a cannibal. He is returning to non-existence (and this brings to mind the puzzling for most comment of Kierkegaard, " the best life is lived backward".). He is a destroyer, a toppler of idols, not a builder - he is always in search of what was before. The dilemma? To live (as most do), to half live (as would a Bodishattva) or to not live at

all, to return (the esthetic)? Which?

And who knowing, really **knowing** all this, can still sing in the cage, the large high ceilinged studio, who can still stand up and clap for all the clowns and jesters dancing around in the center ring. Who can stand this great spectacle? Who? I would like to meet this man?

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The trial of the poet is the circus of mankind. A black humour fills the room and the poet has to laugh with the rest. But for him the outcome is serious. He must cross that room of laughing idiots, laughing himself, on a tightrope and emerging from the dark must with the light share a real laugh with no one. All else is too real to be true, unseen, like the agony of flies.

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A writer writes in awe of all that he can't understand, he writes to summon ignorance in tribute, though he is unable to say how or if it has been done. Words scream, beg, con, coax, kiss and seduce the silence to reveal her secrets. All writers of any worth begin blank, in complete ignorance -- and in this way they allow they allow the bottomless silence to speak through stuttering words of gratitude.

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We kill the flower when we dream about its beauty.

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April 01

It's "Poetry Month", as declared by those invisible scions that we only know and refer to as "they" or "the powers that be". Yes, it's true and I'm not fooling you. But what does this really mean? It would seem that poetry has become some canned good, taken off the shelf, dusted and heartlessly consumed until spring and fresh vegetables are available. Our society has "commoditized" poetry and taken the joy and freedom out of it and squeezed it into a calendar. What does it say about us, our society and more importantly our individual souls (and I don't hesitate to use this word, experience teaches me the necessity of the spirit), when we turn poetry into some nice, contrite, ceremonial event -- when it becomes therapeutic and as easy to consume as coca-cola, just a kind, gentle, placid antedote, sugar pill? Doesn't it say that we live in a joyless world, a world where we do things only for the sake of being told to do them? Doesn't it say that we are pooped out, that we lack the courage to meet the real demands and intelligence of wild poetry, that we prefer our tea weak and always at 4:00 p.m.? Doesn't it mean that we have lost the ability of "intercourse", that in taming poetry and putting it into the circus tent of ceremony, buffoonery, that we are just in need of a soothing voice, a laugh and that's all? What does it mean when poetry, the revolution that is always in revolution, becomes just another polite affirmation and "thing to do", like billiards or picking one's nose or going to the latest Hollywood thriller? At bottom it means that we don't really know what poetry is. It is not a contest or a time of year or self-promotion or a way to feel good. No. It is life itself, the moment that is still, a way of regeneration. Our only salvation being that real poetry always contains this secret and will find those able to receive it. Find those not only in April (and is not April the cruelest month? Is there some snide joke here?) but in august August and alone in the bed sheets of November rain. It will find those who can here it and want to rise

out of the tiredness of civilization (I like Gaugin spit every time I hear this word)
and find the red lips of joy. Poetry needs no one to tell it to be.

“Poetry does not exist in materialistic culture because poetry is a
commerce of the spirit.” Sam Hamill, *The Poet's Work*.

“ There is no deferment for the living”

-- George Seferis, *A Poet's Journal*

In a few weeks will be the Prague Writer's Festival, a time of comradery my newsletter says. Yes, comradery exactly, like a congress of the old communist party. In the same room where Gottwald talked about the worker's solidarity and greatness, the local cultural literati (along with a few international "glitterati", writer's of a known commodity who twinkle and light up the spectacle so others will buy tickets) will proclaim the sacredness of the written word and the "WRITER". I capitalize this because these occasions are just ego boosting auto-da-fes, declarations by the inquisition's masterminds that here stands the GRAND ones. It is an accomodation to the prevailing notion of popularity and fascination with the person. In all the huffaw, the word gets left behind. I know that writing must muddle through these adjustments to "realities" as the publishers roar; book tours, self-agrandissment, signings, conferences, readings, playing the patzy. I know but at the same time I must not shirk from the writer's duty and say the emperor has no clothes on, that all this has nothing to do with writing. It's all just a way of avoiding reading the book, the word. When we touch the author we debase him or her, for we enter their stories, their poems as ill informed spies. In seeing too far we never get anywhere. That is even if the person picks up the book. For most, the author is the point. Few get anywhere near the books. I don't know a writer worth his weight in ink who wouldn't decry this fact.

"The writer's job is to bring in the meat. I don't care whether people stamp it.....what I have to say is in my novels, the rest is gossip."

Mordecai Richler, an interview, *Other Solitudes*
Canadian Multicultural Fictions

April 04

It will soon be Easter, a supposed celebration of man's redemption. But I was reminded by my so "up on everything" newspaper that it's also the 30th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. His memory (and more importantly, achievements) live on. In this century of saints, he was one of the few to resist the temptations of politics or at least, the dirt and dishevelment it so often smears. He, along with Mandela, kept alive the notion of human rights and individual dignity. Not through amendments, politicking, U.N. declarations, envoys and embargos. No, only through a calling of people to a higher ground, a higher good in man. Their legacy will be one of the bright lights of this last 100 years. Gandhi, Solzhenietzen, Sharansky too but not so bright, so true.

In a way I think, it was because of his forceful language. King used "the word" in a poetic and prophetic way, using it to arouse belief -- for something rather than against someone. He stirred people's hearts, black white or whatever. His power of metaphor, the resonance of Old Testament, biblical prophecy and image are undeniably forceful and precient. One would be safe in saying that all being equal, without his language and oration, there would have been no King. Maybe just another compromising southern black Democrat.

I can't help from making the comparison between Jesus and Martin Luther King Jr. however ludicrous it seems on the surface. The first startling fact is that he was

killed so near Easter. The other startling fact is that he is said to have foretold his own death in his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech the night before. Thirdly, the conspiracy theories that abound at present. If in fact we accept the fact of Jesus as historical, then could we not envision a day when the story of Martin Luther is retold, remade and a new church sprouted from his ashes? We have the story, the Judas (James Earl Ray), the Roman powers that be (the CIA, Lyndon Johnson, Mafia theory), the poor and down trodden vs the suppressors and finally we have the man, his words and deeds, his higher message of human dignity, neighbourly love. All things take time, this will probably take longer than the Jesus followers took to create Christianity noting how hard it is too forget in our age, to make the historical into the mythical (or will it given the power of media, its power to make a message, a belief system? -- but this is a big topic, a much too big topic for here). The process has already started, Jesse Jackson his Paul has already christened Memphis as "Calvary, the site of the crucifixion". To be continued.....atleast it is a better road then the holy church of Elvis.

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I just received a large pile of old The New Yorker magazines from my blessed father. Not my first pick in terms of reading material, too gossipy and having that crusty attitude of "America and upper class liberal educated people from the North-East in particular" as the center of a well defined universe. Nonetheless, given my barren pickings here, I'd read a cereal box. Sometimes too, it does one good to read against the grain, we shouldn't limit our enjoyments to only things we like as my grandfather said. That way we only confirm our own prejudices and the truth, startled thought, gets left in the corner.

One of the recent pickings was from Gore Vidal in a series of letters written to a

friend in the 50's and 60's. In one letter he comments about Ezra Pound " who did not speak but posed for hours on end, very much the great poet." . He then ends the description with the trite exclamation, " What asses they are, these poets. How fortunate that one does not have to read them." . Well enough. Writers and good poets write to few readers. The most difficult being the most rewarding sometimes. But the populist, superficial, rich kid like Vidal wrote for the mass, made porridge (not even good porridge) and not the delicate grape. In the same issue I ran across a quote of Nietzsche's which sums up the distinction and makes a good retort to this long ago smite (but we literary types have big memories that reach even into the grave). "Books for all the world are always foul smelling books; the smell of small people clings to them."

Skiffing through these magazines i was very interested in the poetry but for the wrong reasons. Only really one good one in the bunch. All lack any "sound" and are cut up into lines with no reasoned logic other than to say, "hey look here, this is a poem.". And this precisely is the problem with poetry now. It is all just prose, a sort of word processed thought that just dribbles on. Stick the lines together and you get a paragraph. End point. but forgetting the technique, it is the absence of strong and "musing" language which is totally missing. Words are put in as if the poem is an academic exercise, a New York Times crossword. They mistake obscure language with intelligent language. And then too, there is the total absence of strong ideas, of directed discourse with the reader. Just a post post modern mish-mash of feeling, as if it were intended to disorient the reader with its obscurity and coded polemics. An "anything I say must be art" attitude echoing the modern belief that the truth is relative and beauty just merely what one believes. So, being the undercover surrealist I am, I decided to prove something to myself and set about to make a poem (a better poem, I insist) from these magazines. In each issue there are two poems. Each seem inexplicably to have a length of 14 lines (does this

have something to do with the average attention span of The New Yorker reader, like why a record is always 2 minutes and 45 seconds long? or does it have something to do with making it seem Shakesperian?) So, I took out 4 magazines and made the following collage from the poems within, taking 2 lines from each poem. The starting and ending lines are also the starting and ending lines of the first and last poems used. The line cting is also the same as the originals. I hope you see what I mean, how anything thrown together represents art in our age. If you agree this is a good poem, I've bad and good news for you. But you'll have to figure that out yourself.

ENTERING SCOTT'S NIGHT

Interweaving

of histories:

when I was young and immortal.

I remember the cypresses in the early morning light

The century was breaking and the blame was on default,

The smallest mammal redolent of what was in the wault,

The gull cries, the moan of seamarks,

And the broken sweep of light

of the middle door shelf, on fire, a lit-from-within red,

heart-red, sexual-red, wet neon-red,

no more hand-hauling anchor chains, as when

for sheer love and small money

a broken-off piece of Chinese ideogram

moving across the page.¹

Interesting, isn't it? And can you guess any of the authors? I challenge you to go back to the originals and confirm what I've told you. Nothing remains inspired anymore, only what is recorded. Recorded so one can get their name in the New Yorker and be paraded around town to dinner party after dinner party. Fame is every where and it would seem to be the poet's biggest enemy. Thank god some people don't have to read us.

April 20th

"Don't think so much!". That's what she said. If only I had a beer for every time someone told me that, I'd have my own brewery. I was out with a bunch of students at the pub, finishing up another round of classes, saying good-byes. Discussing whatever comes into my head but inevitably as always, there is someone to always play down thought and questioning with a well meaning but idiotic, "You shouldn't think so much! Just relax and live!". Yes, that seems to be the crux of the problem, how can you live if you don't think? How can you even feel if you don't think? The modern mind, mind "set" has thoroughly been swamped by this feel good attitude of Don't think, just do it, live and let live, chill and like flour in cake the big king maker, it's all just relative.

I'm puzzled by my fellow citizen's docility and refusal to live, live dignified and bravely through that grey matter above the shoulders. Why are we so pooped out, what has exhausted us to the point we are ready to fool ourselves that we live,

¹ the authors are duly recognized as being the following; Title, lines 1 and 2, James Dickey, *Entering Scott's Night*, The New Yorker, Feb. 03, 97. Lines 3 and 4, Harvey Shapiro, *Italy* 1996, TNY, June 9, 97. Lines 5 and 6, Susan Wheeler, *Shanked On The Red Bed*, TNY, June 9, 97. Lines 7 and 8, A. Alvarez, *Mermaid*, TNY, July 28, 97. Lines 9 and 10, Thomas Lux, *Refrigerator*, 1957, TNY, July 28, 97. Lines 11 and 12, Richard Murphy, *Quays*, TNY, Jan. 13, 97. Lines 13 and 14, August Kleinzahler, *Silver Gelatin* TNY, Jan. 13, 1997.

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when in fact we are but existing, only waiting on real life to happen though it never does. Are we maybe in fact not alive at all? The joyless, inanity, this shadow world we all partake in with its routine, don't look side ways, don't question, see what other's see attitude is so conservative, so like a prison that we must call it what it is - a waiting on death.

But who can judge another? The heart of us all remains a mystery and a blind netherworld of feeling. But this feeling comes from the mind, a knowing and reaching out with the tentacles of thought. Like love it refuses to lay down in the bed alone, it wants to be understood. Not only itself to understand but another. Most of the joyless

We are so tired because we are struggling in the mud, the mud of indecision. We've yet to decide on the firm and beautiful land from where drifts the song of the strong. We are so tired.

April 25th

A beautiful day of warmth and sunshine. Due to the wonders of technology, I'm sitting out on my balcony tapping this out on my laptop. But is technology in its many forms really "miraculous". I think we always over state the case and don't see the whole picture. We are great justifiers. I could just as well write this long hand in a note book and save the power, the pollutants spewed out in the manufacturing of this machine. But then again, the production of paper is a great environmental rapist itself. This said, I still must question the utility of most technology. If we really weighed the pluses and minuses, I'm sure they'd always come out against the "new" thing. But what will always give it the edge is precisely that -- that it is new.

Nothing moves the child in us as the "shiny thing". Still, we should question these new "breakthroughs", learn to critically assess and not just jump and buy because it is so hyped and over advertized. Walter Berry, a decent and practical man as I know, recently published a list of questions to ask ourselves before buying new technological "marvels". They bear briefly repeating;

Yet, I am here outside writing, taking in the marvellous of life. I won't describe the picture, we all have our own and this will suffice. Just think of the first warm spring day of sunshine jumpstarting the body and soul . You know what I mean. It is a feeling that can't be described, it is life itself, an irreducible. Filled with this life giving we are more and all I can say is, "thank god". I am now turning off the machine.

April 26

A slow morning trying to slowly awake and function. Ah! the hardships of getting old! Rolls, mangled crow's feet, a leaking memory, pessimism and the inability to function well in the morning. Today, even a few stiff cups of black as black can be coffee, can't lift the heaviness. It is as if it is a metaphor of existence. Aging, we slow towards death, find it hard to awaken and arise anew. Aging, we hang onto life desperately in the evenings, afraid and unable to sleep. Aging, we sleep less because we live less every day -- live less like these mornings spent in the heavy stupor of a body getting unused to life.

But thank god for the mind, the thing that never ages. The thing that alone rises us out of the sleep of "the one", the unconscious and organic world of self -abandoned

existence and into the arms of metaphor, of signing and giving significance. The crown which man wears is but imagination, the ability to create through comparison, mostly the basic comparison of now and past with what could be, to project but also through the ability to connect things in idea. Everything it seems is a metaphor for the intelligent man. He looks at the bed and doesn't just see a bed but sleep, dreams, his last love, a lie, a sea.....This man fills his world with meaning, he gives and allows life. He doesn't ask why but does why to move towards why.

In the imaginative embrace that is intelligence, the mind sees the interconnectedness of life. It holds close the truth that is apparent in all but seen by few. This is why the poet is held in such high esteem in all ages. Not for the mere form of what he or she does, not for their politics or life style. No. Only for their ability to pierce through the apparent separation and loneliness that life lingers in and to connect and associate. To say and show through metaphor and association what really is, what all is. It is the answer to Lewis Carroll's question, "Why is a raven like a writing table?". We can believe that if there existed a supra-intelligent being, a god like man, he would know how all is connected, threaded and stitched together. He would like the hedgehog know one thing, though the fox knows many things, to paraphrase Isaac Berlin. He would know the one thing we'd give up our many things for. It is this that crowns the poet, as too it does genius -- to see the obvious, to see anew the old and then to sing it.

I'm getting old, so old so, I must bend to the inevitable, wear the bottom of my trousers rolled. But still the mind, my mind flickers and pushes back at the night (despite the bodies reluctance this/these mornings -- all bodies have gravity didn't Newton know from the apple). I try to see and find meaning among the misconceived separation that I walk through. I see and cry out. From this instinct of

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imagination and intelligence, the only thing we really have as our own, is born the poem that thing of singular, uniqueness always saying the same thing, answering why a writing table is like a raven.

But no poems today, just a trying to kickstart my body into some semblance of being. How we live is a metaphor of existence, the body tells us so. True and in its leaning towards a finality, there is nothing we can do. But too, atleast the mind knows it, my mind has seen the relationship between my heavy eyed mornings and life as it always is. In doing this I live what never dies, I join all. Only the decadent need the lie, didn't someone so pointedly say. I have annihilated seperation. Unfortunately/fortunately the process must always continue. It's a continual eating of ourselves for those who want to live, to "mind", to find the always between all things. I am doing my best.

" That which is happiness; is to be dissolved unto something
complete and great."

--- epitath, Willa Cather

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I am watching a box of light, seeing images that come from somewhere, a somewhere that I know nothing about. The livingroom is a theatre of world events. In a matter of minutes I've been around the world, seen Japanese sitting around a table, watched a man in Serbia raise a flag, looked into the eyes of a boy in Brazil. Or have I been around the world?????????I'm already forgetting. I'm watching TV.

I won't re-hash all the various arguements for or against TV. They are all common knowledge, here and there. What I will state is what should be obvious but is so

seldom acknowledged; television can't teach us anything. It can't teach us anything in the sense that it informs but doesn't transform, it gives facts but doesn't help us figure them, at its best it is entertainment and at its worst, propoganda, false teaching.

All teaching is meant to lead to "right action", it is to assist discovery and in the end is "what remains when all else has been forgotten". Unfortunately television leads to nothing, not even memory. How quick we forget and need another program. It is surface. The eye deceives and its sense overwhelms. Hypnosis is as good a term for the drowsy, half world of television viewing as there exists. Television has created a world where there is no response, no reaction -- just a drowsy, "Ah, so that's how it is". There is no education, no affective result here. Just an endless flickering of mind softening mirage.

I say this because not more than a few moments ago, the image of a little Korean boy sitting on the cold ground, ground into me. It was during a report on the talks between the two Koreas and the need for more food aid to the North. the boy had big eyes that seemed to hold up his bony body. Their hollow look showed the world in its mid-night dress, a world of suffering and pain, needless suffering and pain. It struck me like a hammer hurled by some god uphigh. How can one watch and not do! How many times before has this vision slid by in indifference! How can we bear our lonely lives in the face of this suffering! Anger! Incredulity! Outrage! all shouted and sprang through me. Yet nothing changed, here I am writing this, the boy is most likely dead, grist for worms, potentiality now so unpotent.

This is the dilema of all our lives. Knowing what we know how can we live without trying to change things. Yet it seems that the bug of self-preservation, indifference to others plights is stronger. Life rolls on in sameness, though we know so much of

what goes on. We are not helpless in these situations but we pretend and prefer to believe so, the effort is too much. We glide through life.

It seems we watch the news now with much the same eyes as we watch film or television. It makes us sleepy, it disinfects us. We watch the news just to be assured that pain and suffering exist, to be assured that the theatre of life is still there, that things still operate as usual. We treat THE WORLD as the world of fiction, as a story that entertains. We prefer knowledge of situations to understanding and the consequent and inevitable action of understanding. We watch the news as any other TV program, a man dies so what?, the lights will come on and then well get a good cappuccino and plan tomorrows shopping excursion. We watch the news as if this weren't really happening, as if it weren't something that we could do something about. We are indifferent, we don't act, we are uneducated.

It is getting worse, the modern view of man as independent and solipsistic, only looking after his own little space is dominant. I think we all live our lives fearful of being active, involved human beings, of really seeing and declaring. We live our lives now as if it we TV. We see so much around us but we just walk on by, drift through, eyes glazed and watching hypnotized. but it dulls us (perhaps because all the others are only watching), so conditioned by the TV's pulsating possibilities and plots. We are dulled and so we trudge up the stairs to turn on the TV -- we can't live with ourselves anymore.

I'm no one to speak. Yesterday while crossing the street in front of my apartment I had to wait for a large truck pulling out from a bottled water depot. Beside me, holding hands, waited a young girl, 4 or 5 and her grandmother. Probably off to the supermarket to buy a treat. The old Tatra trucks here belch big clouds of toxic exhaust as the gear up and accelerate. The soot covering my balcony in copious

layers of grime bears its evidence. This one was no different. The cloud of fumes drifted across towards us, hitting in particular the little girl. She let go of her grandma's hand and began furiously rubbing her eyes. I noted the sight but continued walking home. Only later did the indignity rise as I told some students unpolitely that sometimes I think this country is one bloody sewer. But it was only later, though i could have rapped on the drivers window or said something to the lady at the time. Just to acknowledge is all we need to do to change things, but no, we drift and don't declare. We watch things go by. We are victims always. We learn nothing, nothing remains. We are uninvolved with the world, we are watching TV.

Atleast I wrote a poem about it. A poem that no one will read so busy they are with the hypnotic and turned off glare of image after moving image. Or some bestseller. But atleast in my silent manner, I declared a wrong. This is enough for us all to do, to change things. This would seem to be the challenge before the poet, to declare and call a spade a spade, to stand up and be counted. So much poetry nowadays is just oatmeal, not even good oatmeal -- meant to be digested and then forgotten. Nothing lingers. There is no sense of declaration, of showing, of inspiring, of educating (and I don't mean in the pedantic, moralizing way). Poets need to get dangerous, to scream and stand up, to get involved with the world again. they need to be feared, feared for they really do hold the world in their balance, seeing what they so importantly see. Feared for they really are as Stalin declared, "the engineer of human souls". Poetry must again try to be outspoken, to be large and boisterous, to find its step again. We need more daring from our poets in this time of crisis, of lulled humanity. A soft shrug won't wake the beast, man the real lively beast. Cold water, thumb screws, a slap, a loud roar and more..... Let us not be guilty through silence, indifference. Let us not watch the TV news as we would the cartoons. Us poets, lets remember we belong to our times, this is our inheritance, the future.

“ Statistics tell us that never before have so many books (and poetry books, *my italics*) been sold. The trouble is that hardly anybody I come across believes any longer that literature serves any great purpose beyond allieviating boredom on the bus or underground, or has any higher ambition beyond being transformed into television or movie scripts. Literature (and poetry too, *my italics*) has gone light..... We all like to escape from reality: indeed, that is one of the functions of literature. But making the present unreal, turning actual history into fiction, has the effect of demobilizing citizensalong this path we may well slide into a world where there are no citizens, only spectators, a world where although formal democracy may be preserved, we will be resigned to the kind of lethargy dictatorships aspire to establish.”

-- Mario Vargas Llosa, **With Pens Drawn**, *Utne Reader* , Oct 97

May 01

I'd just finished masterbating into the sink to the rhythm of the tub's filling water. I'd just climbed in and was awash with a reading of Browning's lines, This path so soft to pace shall lead / Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed! I'd just relaxed into a hopefullness, an unburdening of my deepest sorrow when when the doorbell rang. Jezismaria! I waited for whoever to go away. But no, a blasted persistence, the modern was knocking. Goddamnit! They must have heard the swishing of the water in the tub (the bathroom is right by the door). So, I lumbered out of the warmth and womb like water, threw on some clothes and yanked the door open. And who to my wonder filled eyes should appear. Two prim and proper young Jehovah's Witnessess, ready to tell me so kindly that the world was to end soon, so very soon. I fained an inability to speak "their language" and bid them good luck. Off they went along the Watchtower.

What hypocrisy and lunacy in this world. What is this moral drive of my fellow human beings, this moral drive to live what one can never live, to complicated and inhibit? What terrible evangelical horrors have been committed in the name of Paul, not Jesus. How do these people miss the words of Jesus and mistakenly take heart in Paul's bitter controlling message? Ah! The solution is so simple yet no one dares to do it. It is what Bertrand Russell so horrifically and clearly stated; just to love each other, to do no evil. It is so simple, the problems of this world, just exist in love. Yet we complicate, add a bit of religion, misplaced upbringing, political thumb twaddling, fear, violence. The cup overfloweth, there is a flood and a deluge. We are lost I say, lost we are

Please forgive the outburst but I have had enough. Who of us might dare to live in the light? To declare and be? I look now outside my window and these same witnesses are gathered outside, each after pillaging through an apartment building, testifying to each other about "the crime". They look like Amway men or drug dealers done up for a funeral. Curse them all! this morning of my cracking heart. curse them all and all others in their phoneness! Skin deep we sleep.

Again, forgive the outburst. I do think and believe we all must preach ourselves, our beliefs. But I put the emphasis on OUR. It is so hard to come to find what is OURS and not a mere icon, idol, imitation, nice sounding words. We must be tough on ourselves. But above all, preach your truth when you've found it. Yes, we must all be evangelical and believe. But the rub is that we must preach by our lives, in living. Not through advertisements, Sunday church going or ringing up at apartment doors. Why aren't these people in rags and tossed hair, on the corner like now, crying out, crying out, crying out for crying out loud! Why? because they too are fearful, un really believing, they cower in doorways of doctrine. They have not come

through, they have not been surprised by joy. This is what I believe and now preach, reach, reach and reach for the golden peach.

I remember reading through Dostoevsky's Notebooks for The Brothers Karaamazov, trying to follow his minds weave through morality, what make's a man, searching for a little grist for my own novel, my own mill of the mind. I remember thinking of a mysterious statement that I've always carried with me but until then never quite understood. Words by the great Karl Barthes;

"Faith beholds life and existence where the man of the world sees nothing but death and non-existence; and contriwise it sees death and non-existence where he beholds full blooded life..... The living must die in order that the dead may be made alive. *The things which are must be seen as though they were.....*"

Ironically, these words were in commentary of St. Paul, Roman's 4:17, God who quickeneth the death and calleth the things that are not as though they were. What I understand here is that real living is as a great poet lives, as affirmation and transformation -- it is not a struggle against. It is seeing what isn't, it is going past appearances. It is what Valery was trying to say when he declared "the proper, unique and perpetual object of thought is that which does not exist. The morality, the stinking and ordinary dry of love morality we sniff at every day is false, filled with what we think is. It arises out of weakness, the fact we understand that it is easier to try to be what we aren't (usually in the name of human subservience, often called social bonding) than to choose freedom, the freedom to be and damn it all, damn the rest. We must wake up and realize we don't understand the mysteries of life, even evil and death bring life. A living thing is infinite in contradiction, we don't but know a plug nickels worth, let's take the sucker out of our mouths and cry, cry for crying out loud. There is no "one morality" for all men, rejoice and join in our

uniqueness, this is what I'd like these young women flush with such great but trampled upon desire. Look, look higher!

We should celebrate our spirit, our special life that is a gift given to us. Listen to the small voice inside, follow it alone. Don't be comfortable, comforted. We must dance in our chains and thank, be thankful for life -- for in truth the only thing really ours is death. This is the only thing we all share. We must learn to see that which doesn't exist (yet).

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Yes, life is filled with paradox. Today is May Day, a day to celebrate the joys and importance of work. And how do we do this? By taking a holiday, not working.

Why do we fill our days with invisible fright
 tip tip toeing past delight, 9 to 5
 out of sight of love or lemon trees
 out of heart full of freeze
 frost on a fence
 a tongue never sees
 Why don't we do as our heart would please
 Why are we on our knees?

I wrote this a few days ago and it sums up my attitude towards "Work", that's work with a capital "W". Work as we've so audaciously split from the rest of life is against the impulses of the heart, the compass point, pointing of thought and consciousness. It is enslavement, a shackling of the soul. Yet, in the mere 300 or so years since its tiny beginnings, work has been applauded as what an old communist

stalwart proclaimed only yesterday on the plains of Letna, above Prague, as “the best medicine”. Then we have the old Protestant “work ethic” and the American myth of the poor man rising up into wealth through hard work. Work has become an antidote for all success, all attainment. But it would seem that as a means of liberation it has only enslaved. Our salvation in terms of personal comfort, longer lives, better streets and roads has become our “albatross”. Worse yet that we don’t recognize it -- we continue to think of work as a physical necessity. Read the following words of a witness to the freeing of the slaves in Haiti, circa 1776;

“ These men (freed slaves), it is said, have no master ----- they have one, and the most terrible, the most imperious of masters, that is need. It is this that reduces them to the most cruel dependance.”

Yes, today work doesn’t make you free, it machs us and makes us dependant. It creates a life of perpetual regularity. With my own eyes I’ve seen it come to no good. My own family a testament to how years of work break the man, woman, break them in body and soul. Yet, the triumph of modern society is specifically in spreading the lie that “work isn’t work”, in blurring the edges of life and work. Atleast 60 or 160 years ago, a man knew and objectively thought of work as a cruel material necessity, a means to an end --- as all life is, a compromise between necessity and freedom, rule and choice. Now, we glorify work and think that life is but work. I speak so often with people who have nothing to say except about their work. They are schizophrenics, they are enslaved by a greater need, that of respect, authority, heartless consumption which they can unfortunately find only falsely, pretentiously in work as it now exists.

Society, operates on such false premises. It offers up progress as a notion and aim of not working, yet it disvalues a man who would live as if this were the case. The

modern religion, which I put under the label of "progress", is the same as all religions. It offers an end but would kill the man who might realize it. Technological developments point inevitably to a leisure society, less jobs and more free (read, living) time. Yet what do we do? We create more unnecessary work. We refuse to let go of the nipple. I laugh outloud at the current notions of work sharing, or the 35 hour week. Why do we want to so equally share the pain? Why can't we celebrate the fact that we are richer, able to support more members with less work? Why can't we enjoy our freedom, just pay the redundant, keep the machine greased? We can't because we are fully mesmerized by the myth of work.

Me, if only I could be a lazy man, be good at something!? I think it was Dostoevsky's Underground man who said this. The poet is in essence the one man who seeks to clear away all the clutter and falsity between the notions of work and life, living. He or she is free and aswim in the world/words of creation. He or she is as much a poet in spirit as in the flesh and the fact or condition of sitting down to write. A celebrant of that which is hidden, the invisible yet so necessary result. The poet though is confronted with the fact that his work has no value in the material, work for money and exchange world. His "shadow work" doesn't put bread into his or her mouth -- who would buy air, the most necessary of things yet the most free? Poetry has no "value" as such, so the poet struggles to live, to keep the apartment, to find a few dimes to travel, to buy ink and paper. Yet, the poet survives perhaps because of this fact, this gravity. It makes the poet stronger. I'm not one to bemoan the plight of the poet in our culture, society. I would never like to see poems sold and shuffled about like dollar bills or famefilled paintings on Sotheby's auction block. The mystery and secretness of poetry are its power. Thus it must remain close to life's beat and pulse, this way it is life itself, a meaning that raises up our lives out of their plodding work a day, replaceable world, a world, boots in which most tread -- they tread thinking they are valuable and necessary in their work but knowing deep down this

isn't so, this is only material necessity. The spiritual necessity and truth of his or her life, which we all search for, hidden in the poor poet's mind, a mind which can't ever be bought, a soul which can never be sold.

Work as it resides as a notion in the modern or "post-industrial" consciousness, is embedded and fed by our belief in progress. We work with the illusion of making things better, be it our own material lives, our children's or society's as a whole. It is a reflection of our desire for an end, an Eden, a stability. We have embraced change and sweat in it's name only paradoxically because we believe it will end, we will all be able to rest, have paradise regained. But is this possible, we are blind to the contradiction. How can work lead to rest? We all know someone who has worked hard their whole life and who can't rest, who upon retirement (and I won't comment on the contradictions of this term) spend their days empty, dishirivelled, unwanted, dispirited --- in two words, feeling useless. Why? One because of the conditioning nature of work and how in order to do it, we slowly come to believe in it, puff ourselves up with titles and a hollow sense of self-worth. We justify the toil, the indignity of divorcing ourselves from ourselves and what we'd rather be with a brain-washing formula of "it'll get better", "I'm important at work", with a belief in progress and a postponement of living for later life. I once wrote a poem concerning this and I think it clarifies the some what abstract sense of what I want to say;

But the vital and fatal nail is rendered in the name of progress and a better future. All ideologies and revolutions are built upon this mantle of faith. A faith in the future

beckoning. But isn't imperfection imbedded in all. Look at the perfection of a circle. It seems so but yet who has ever calculated pie with precision -- does anything ever sit still? Joh Stuart Mill, a progressive and a true worshipper of progress and "a heading towards", a movement towards an all knowing science which has divined all, set out life in rules and regularities came in the end to see the folly of this all. A folly that every man should see. He experienced a nervous breakdown when he realized that he didn't really want to see that end, that paradise over the hell but merely wished to act as though he did. He froze before this dilemma, realizing how empty had been his actions, based on falsity and somehow opposed to rationality, opposed to the true nature and value of life. We cannot do one thing and believe another. We cannot work and sacrifice against ourselves and still believe in the garden of Eden, in a Utopia (which More so aptly named and spoofed, meaning as it does in Greek, Nowhere). Doesn't even the story of Eden mock this notion. The facts of the story suggest that they were thrown out for wanting to eat of the tree of knowledge, God's knowledge. Their punishment was that they must now work by the sweat of their own brow. So why don't we equate work with sin, as punishment? We do in a sense but as I pointed out above, we don't want to face this truth, we'd rather cover it up, lend it some redeeming value. We'd rather try to use it against God and strive for a heaven on earth. Meanwhile our burden becomes heavier and we are no closer to throwing it off.

What I wanted to make clear by this long rant was that work is against life.

Necessary in the short term but nonetheless, a postponement of living, a not being on one's own time. The poet is the voice of this liberation of spirit, this movement away from what hasn't been to what is. All poet's of any power and authenticity sing a song of pleasure and work as a creative expression. They sing a song of pain and work as we know it as a degradation and tragic ball and chain around the feet of mankind. I can only laugh at all those poets (mostly in the last century) who

glorified work in the name of progress (or science or art for that matter). One finds so quaint now Mayakovsky's ode's to the socialist worker, all the "realism" of the school of socialist realism, the Futurist's faith in the machine, Eluard's, "merveilleux quotidienne" and even the wind of Whitman lulls when he sings a list about workers and their goings on, seeming to celebrate their travail in his A Song For Occupations. Yet he redeems himself at the end with, "In them, not yourselfyou and your soul enclose all things, regardless of estimation,.....". Yes, there is no progress but the progress of the heart.

But... Whitman" do I contradict myself, 50...

The poet is the great heretic in the church of progress for he or she knows full well the secret that work must be given by man himself and not pulled out of him forcefully, through need. The poet everyday works and is filled with the miracle of existence. The poem is not given from without, constructed to set rules but is made within. The work of the poet is organic and bears no difference with life nor the moment as it bubbles up. A poet is a poet not just at his desk or in the writing of the poem or when signing books (what few he does) but at all times, in dream, in walking through the streets, during his lowly underpaid other job, when wrapping his hands around a coffee. Knowing this, the poet tries to convey this to others, to free them if you will, to allow others to see that life must be entered into at all times and we shouldn't glorify work that just doesn't allow that to happen, that robotizes a person's response, which falsifies his or her very self. Willy Lowman can attest to that, the sadness of life put off, of believing (and willfully but slowly) the lies that lays at the bottom of work. In our society, the first standard question asked of a person beyond the automatic "How are you?", "Fine, thanks" which really isn't a question, is "What do you do?". I've always detested this convention, this equating of what a man does as work with who he is. Wouldn't it be better to atleast leave this open ended by asking, "Who are you really?". But so hypnotized with the value and status of work we would never see the problem here, the false judging. I often

respond when asked this question, "Nothing" and the responses are very revealing. Most assume I'm rich and don't continue down this vein, many just incomprehensibly turning away. Some brave souls counter with a, "Ah come on! You must do something!". To which I then reply, "Yes, I exist". Try it some time. But one answer I always avoid when asked what I do is to say I'm a poet. Nobody knows what to say after that other than "Where have you been published". There again we are back on work's weary road and it shows more the public's trite and rote level of conversation (and yes, sometimes listen to others they don't talk as much as repeat, repeat the same conversations over and over again, with mere substitutions) and inability to encounter others as a person not a position, a money maker. I don't say this because it saddens me. Better to reply, garbage man or farmer.

Role of Farmer

I just spent the evening rereading Nadja over a few perfect beers in the local pub. I always get quite a few stares in restaurants, cafes, pubs as I sit there concentrating on my book. It is as if I'm an anomolie. And it's true, go anywhere and how many people in public do you see engrossed in a book? Maybe, a newspaper, the flippant, flipping through others misfortune, but not books.

I have always loved Breton's "miraculousness", how he sees the world so full of symbol and meaning. A true poet, who stumbles through existence almost drunk from the connective juice and meaning which acts, the tick-tocks of existence throws at him. This evening I read the first half of *Nadja*, the part I always least enjoyed and to my delight was transfixed by it. It shows how much reading and the word is emeshed in our own personal time, how writing awaits not just the reader but a reader who is "in time". All good writing having a hidden message, spirit that comes to life when read at the right time -- it is like allegory and parable.

Part 1 ends appropriately enough with Breton's powerful yea saying for life, the moment and his wise words about work. Here is a spattering of his mind's spray.

" And after this, let no one speak to me of work -- I mean the moral value of work I prefer, once again, walking by night to believing myself a man who walks by daylight. There is no use being alive if one must work. The event from which each of us is entitled to expect the revelation of his own life's meaning -- that event which I may not yet have found, but on whose path I seek myself -- *is not earned by work.*"

Just as an aside. Thinking about the idea of work we all carry around in our heads, thinking of this, and living in the residue of the communist "worker's paradise", I arrived at a little theory as to why capitalism seems to have won the war.

Communism made people believe and work for "others", it tried to usurp the basic selfish drive in people. Also, it clearly defined the boundries of work and pleasure. There was work and then reward for your labour. The focus being so strongly on

“the model worker”, it clearly defined and delimited this creature. In the end it was a weakness that destroyed the system from within. The contradictions between the reality and the model were too apparent due to this clearly drawn picture of the worker and his “paradise”. The people could support this religion of the here and now only so long. Capitalism by contrast has dulled the lines between work and home, work and leisure. This is the true strength (but an insidious, *captiv*ating, chain like strength) of the modern economy. Business isn’t something we just do and then go home after. It is everywhere and lurks in our deepest spirit. It appears at dinner parties, on the ice of the hockey game, in our invitation cards. We are no longer capable of drawing a distinction between work and our life. We look into the waters like Nacissus and mistake the image for ourselves. We have won the war but at the cost of our souls. I look out the window this holiday, right now and in the twilight see a man beside his “Oakley” sunglasses decaled car, in his purple suit and mobile phone in hand to ear. This is the new Czech man, the new worker, the new model. I can only like Havel who I think on his better days of spiritual contemplation of his brethren might say, “what good does it do a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?”.

June 01

Here I am on a cold (relatively) and rainy day, squeezing in a few minutes of solitude and contemplation before the computer’s screen (scream?). What is it that I’m actually doing? What is this mysterious and lonely conversation a writer has with him or herself? What is the answer to this search, the question I posed when I began this work? What does this slow talk with myself (?), this inaudible mumble

with the universal "I", the perfect reader, the one who might in the future stumble upon these words, mean?. On the face of it, this is a deviant, crazy, mad, psychotic and perverse activity. It makes no sense, is "inactive" and against life in a sense. What is this talking to oneself, this self-importance, the pounding on the chest, this recidivism and withdrawal away from life for more? Don't only the mad talk to themselves, misunderstood as they are in their own little world and language of symbols? What is and where does it come from, this great hope against hope, the faith the writer swallows in the name of the words he utters? How can a writer (and even more a poet) do what he does in silence unheard, never knowing if or when he'll be heard? The poet has no guarantee of an audience, no monetary reward, not even accolades or fame. From where does this power usher, to let itself be heard? It is almost laughable this pursuit, this writing of letters across the page, signifying something to no one in hopes that someone will accept, intercept the signal. How bold is the writer to seek to throw himself out of himself, that in talking to oneself he is also talking to everyone, wanting everyone to know. How bold that he or she would want the world to be "ME".

Many times I wonder, why do I sit and let words pass through me, even more, I wonder why I record them? But here is the key, all great writers and more so poets are touched by a destiny, a sense of an end --- they can't but do what they do. It is as if the road was already marked out, all the books already written, the writer just to play the part and see it done. A prisoner, he can't but. I sit here and touch the future. My hunger is a hunger of all artists, the hunger for something stable, final, complete. A hunger for resolution, a touching of the "other". So I sit when I can and commune as I have done wondering who will find these words, what paths have led another to hear this voice I summon? I am dying, mumbling like Kafka's Hunger Artist, " ... if I had found it (the food I liked), believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.", unable to do anything else but

commune with angels, shock them into preserving something and beckoning a reader, a reader I need as much as the reader needs me.

Essentially, we all experience the same thing -- it is a crisis of belief. Here, in this country far away from my clear eyed, light Canada I always experience this feeling of estrangement, of being a stranger in an even stranger land. Just to pose the question, what am I doing here, why this not that, why am I bringing my hand to greet my friend, why am I not hitting him, what makes anything be? Just to pose this question lets slip the self, the ego, the "me", into a dislocated world of drift and haze. There is no center that holds. This is the modern dilemma, yet we resolve it with belief, a belief in anything -- our jobs, duty, our superiority, our nothingness, vanity, righteousness, the family.....But digging deeper the poet sees the ephemeral world beyond necessity, beyond what is. The miracle that is the moment pushes up and swamps all else. The poet sees that behind the bravado of belief, there is no foothold, all is unknowable. We can't know the truth, our belief just a prop. Everything stumbles, goes out of focus, the force of life itself rears up on the lips of this question, why this not that? To live, to grasp the hand of the human community, to avoid being eaten by life itself, the poet must believe, we all must believe however falsely. This is the mind's energy, what enables it to continue running, belief. "Je crois donc je suis", said Pascsal in retort to Descartes rationality, empiricism. He went deeper, he saw through the thin crust of the mind, skimming off the scum he saw that belief was the godhead, the engine and essence of our "selves". Yet, what remains for one who insists on looking into the waters and seeing nothing to believe. Who won't take belief for an answer, who refuses to be distracted, who as the poet insists on being the "last man"? Once fully acknowledged there is no going back, the question is always there, the drunken, dream like feeling of displacement can't be shaken. Acceptance of the unknowingness of why one thing happens and not another can only lead into the

quiet arms of fatality, determinism. This is the only path left for this man, the only way to continue, to cling to life. In this way more than any other, is how the poet lives -- one foot in the work a day world of belief but disbelieving and the other foot in the mixing bowl of fate, knowing whatever happens must be. Essentially, he too believes but only by default, he believes in the only creed left, he shrugs off all the half answers, superstitions and denies the lies. He sees too far.....

I know the above must seem so very philosophical, detached from life, so polemic and inflated. Yet, ask yourself this question as you sit and watch others pass by your table on this street side cafe of life; what lead me here? or why am I me and not him, her? Why did you go left to this place, not right to another. Why aren't you an Afghani crawling among the rubble of the quake, asking for Allah's answer? Why aren't you the man behind the bar, inhaling the boredom of the cigarette, thinking about how he'll fix his leaking tap when he gets home? Or go further, why didn't something else happen? Why didn't you call your sister this morning, why didn't you look there instead of here, why didn't you read something else rather than this. You get the point, we all have to draw a line in protection, to create an imaginary center -- this is the line of belief, it is life itself. Yet do not deny those few who see further, who breathe this question, who can't look away, do not deny them their sedatives. Destiny, or just the belief in what they write, in their writing desk.