

GERTRUDE AND LEW

A Double Bill

Aram Saroyan

Aram Saroyan
5482 Village Green
Los Angeles, CA 90016
(323) 298-5609
E-mail: saroyancompany@earthlink.net
Website: www.aramsaroyan.com

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GERTRUDE STEIN LECTURES IN AMERICA

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PROGRAM NOTE

In 1903, when she was twenty-nine, Gertrude Stein left America to settle in Paris. She returned to her native land only once, in 1934, when the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* had made her, for the first time in her life, a celebrity. Crowds greeted her wherever she went as she traveled across the country, giving lectures to overflow audiences, lectures in which she discusses the perceptions that provided the basis for her writing. *Gertrude Stein Lectures in America* is an adaptation of one of these lectures.

GERTRUDE STEIN LECTURES IN AMERICA

Stage with lectern.

ANNOUNCER
(over P.A.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us welcome our distinguished guest,
Miss Gertrude Stein.

GERTRUDE STEIN, an elderly woman with a compact bearing,
makes her way on stage and pauses at the lectern and looks out on
her audience, eventually smiles and begins.

GERTRUDE STEIN

Hello, and thank you, thank you very much.

[A beat.]

One cannot come back too often to the question what is
knowledge and to the answer knowledge is what one knows.

What is English literature that is to say what do I know about

it, that is to say what is it. What is English literature, by English literature I mean American literature too.

Knowledge is the thing you know and how can you know more than you do know. But I do know a great deal about literature about English literature about American literature.

There is a great deal of literature but not so much that one can know it. And that is the pleasant the delightful the fascinating the peaceful thing about literature that there is a great deal of it but that one can all one's life know all of it.

In a book I wrote called *How To Write* I made a discovery which I considered fundamental, that sentences are not emotional and that paragraphs are. I found out about language paragraphs are emotional and sentences are not and I found out something else about it. I found out that this difference was not a contradiction but a combination and that this combination causes one to think endlessly about sentences and paragraphs because the emotional paragraphs are made up of unemotional sentences.

I found out a fundamental thing about plays. The thing I found out about plays was too a combination and not a contradiction and it was something that makes one think endlessly about plays.

That something is this.

The thing that is fundamental about plays is that the scene as depicted on the stage is more often than not one might say it is almost always in syncopated time in relation to the emotion of anybody in the audience.

What this says is this.

Your sensation as one in the audience in relation to the play played before you your sensation I say your emotion concerning that play is always either behind or ahead of the play at which you are looking and to which you are listening. So your emotion as a member of the audience is never going on at the same time as the action of the play.

This is a thing to know and knowledge as anybody can know is a thing to get by getting.

What is knowledge. Of course knowledge is what you know and what you know is what you do know.

In order to know one must always go back.

I think I may say I may say I know that I was already troubled by this in that my first experience at a play. The thing seen and the emotion did not go on together.

Nervousness consists in needing to go faster or to go slower so as to get together. It is that that makes anybody feel nervous.

Now in a real scene in which one takes part at which one is an actor what does one feel as to time and what is it that does or does not make one nervous.

I wish to illustrate this from a bit of *The Making of Americans*:

This one, and the one I am now beginning describing is Martha Hersland and this is a little story of the acting in her of her being in her very young living, this one was a very little one then and she was running and she was in the street and it was a muddy one and she had an umbrella that she was dragging and she was crying. I will throw the umbrella in the mud, she was saying, she was very little then, she was just beginning her schooling. I will throw the umbrella in the mud, she said and no one was near her and she was dragging the umbrella and bitterness possessed her, I will throw the umbrella in the mud, she was saying and nobody heard her,

the others had run ahead to get home and they had left her, I will throw the umbrella in the mud, and there was desperate anger in her, I have throwed the umbrella in the mud, burst from her, she had thrown the umbrella in the mud and that was the end of it all in her. She had thrown the umbrella in the mud and no one heard her as it burst from her, I have throwed the umbrella in the mud, it was the end of all that to her.

That is life the way it is lived.

Why yes of course and there is a reasonable and sometimes an unreasonable and very often not a reasonable amount of excitement in everybody's life and when it happens it happens in that way.

All this is very important, and important for me and important, just important. It has of course a great deal to do with the theater a great great deal.

The business of Art as I tried to explain in *Composition as Explanation* is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present.

Anybody who was as I was, brought up and at the time that I

was brought up was brought up in Oakland and in San Francisco inevitably went to the theater a lot. Actors in those days liked to go out to the Coast and as it was expensive to get back and not expensive to stay there they stayed. Besides that there were a great many foreign actors who came and having come stayed and any actor who stays acts and so there was always a great deal to see on the stage and children went, they went with each other and they went alone, and they went with people who were older, and there was twenty-five cents opera to which anybody went and the theater was natural and anybody went to the theater. I did go a great deal in those days.

It was then a natural thing in the Oakland and San Francisco in which I was brought up to see a great many plays played. Beside there was great deal of opera played and so all of it was natural enough and how did I feel about it.

Generally speaking all the early recollections all a child's feeling of the theater is two things. One which is in a way like a circus that is the general movement and light and air which any theater has, and a great deal of glitter in the light and a great deal of height in the air, and then there are moments, a very very few moments but still moments. One must be pretty far advanced in adolescence before one realizes a whole play.

Up to the time of adolescence when one does really live in a whole play up to that time the theater consists of bright filled space and usually not more than one moment in a play.

I think this is fairly everybody's experience and it was completely mine.

Uncle Tom's Cabin may not have been my first play but it was very nearly my first play. I think my first play really was Pinafore in London but the theater was so huge that I do not remember at all seeing a stage I only remember that it felt like a theater that is the theater did. I doubt if I did see the stage.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* I remember only the escape across the ice, I imagine because the blocks of ice moving up and down naturally would catch my eye more than the people on the stage would.

The next thing was the opera the twenty-five cent opera of San Francisco and the fight in *Faust*. But that I imagine was largely because my brother had told me about the fight in *Faust*. As a matter of fact I gradually saw more of the opera because I saw it quite frequently. Then there was Buffolo Bill and the Indian attack, well of course anybody raised where everybody collected arrow heads and played Indians would notice Indians. And then there was *Lohengrin*, and there all that I saw was the swan being changed into a boy, our insisting on seeing that made my father

with us lose the last boat home to Oakland, but my brother and I did not mind, naturally not as it was the moment.

In spite of my having seen opera quite often the first thing that I remember as sound on the stage was the playing by some English actor of Richelieu at the Oakland theater and his repeated calling out, Nemours Nemours. That is the first thing that I remember hearing with my ears at the theater and as I say nothing is more interesting to know about the theater than the relation of sight and sound. It is always the most interesting thing about anything to know whether you hear or you see. And how one has to do with the other. It is one of the important things in finding out how you know what you know.

Then I enormously remember Booth playing Hamlet but there again the thing I noticed and it is rather a strange thing to have noticed is his lying at the Queen's feet during the play. One would suppose that a child would notice other things in the play than that but that is what I remember and I noticed him there more than I did the play he saw, although I knew that there was a play going on there, that is the little play. It was in this way that I first felt two things going on at one time. That is something that one has to come to feel.

Then the next thing I knew was adolescence and going to the theater all the time, a great deal alone, and all of it making an outside inside existence for me, not so real as books, which were all inside me, but so real it the theater made me real outside of me which up to that time I never had been in my emotion. I had largely been so in an active daily life but not in any emotion.

Could I see and hear and feel at the same time and did I.

I began to be a good deal troubled by all these things, the more emotion I felt while at the theater the more troubled I became by all these things.

And then I was relieved.

As I said San Francisco was a wonderful place to hear and see foreign actors as at that time they liked it when they got there and they stayed and they played.

I must have been about sixteen years old and Bernhardt came to San Francisco and stayed two months. I knew a little French of course but really it did not matter, it was all so foreign and her voice being so varied and it all being so French I could rest in it untroubled. And I did.

It was better than the opera because it went on. It was better

than the theater because you did not have to get acquainted. The manners and customs of the French theater created a thing in itself and it existed in and for itself as the poetical plays had that I used so much to read, there were so many characters just as there were in those plays and you did not have to know them they were so foreign, and the foreign scenery and actuality replaced the poetry and the voices replaced the portraits. It was for me a very simple direct and moving pleasure.

I became more interested in opera, I went one went and the whole business almost came together and then finally, just finally, I came not to care at all for music and so having concluded that music was made for adolescents and not for adults and having just left adolescence behind me and beside I knew all the opera anyway by that time I did not care any more for opera.

Then I came to Paris to live and there for a long time I did not go to the theater at all. I forgot the theater, I never thought about the theater. I did sometimes think about the opera. I went to the opera once in Venice and I liked it and then much later Strauss' *Electra* made me realize that in a kind of a way there could be a solution of the problem of conversation on the stage. Besides it was a new opera and it is quite exciting to hear something

unknown really unknown.

But as I say I settled down to Paris life and I forgot the theater and almost forgot opera. There was of course Isadora Duncan and then the Russian ballet and in between Spain and the Argentine and bullfights and I began once more to feel something about something going on at a theater.

And so one day all of a sudden I began to write Plays.

I remember very well the first one I wrote. I called it *What Happened, a Play*. I think and always have thought that if you write a play you ought to announce that it is a play and that is what I did. What Happened. A Play.

I had just come home from a pleasant dinner party and I realized then as anybody can know that something is always happening.

Something is always happening, anybody knows a quantity of stories of people's lives that are always happening, there are always plenty for the newspapers and there are always plenty in private life. Everybody knows so many stories and what is the use

of telling another story. What is the use of telling a story since there are so many and everybody knows so many and tells so many. In the country it is perfectly extraordinary how many complicated dramas go on all the time. And everybody knows them, so why tell another one. There is always a story going on.

So naturally what I wanted to do in my play was what everybody did not always know nor always tell. By everybody I do of course include myself by always I do of course include myself.

And so I wrote, *What Happened, A Play*.

And the idea in *What Happened, A Play* was to express this without telling what happened, in short to make a play the essence of what happened.

I have of course always been struggling with this thing, to say what you nor I nor nobody knows, but what is really what you and I and everybody knows, and as I say everybody hears stories but the thing that makes each one what he is is not that.

I felt that if a play was exactly like a landscape then there

would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is there and so the play being written the relation between you at any time is so exactly that that it is of no importance unless you look at it. Well I did look at it and the result is in all the plays.

MARIUS. I am very pleased I am indeed very pleased that it is a great pleasure.

MARTHA. If four are sitting at a table and one of them is lying upon it it does not make any difference. If bread and pomegranates are on a table and four are sitting at the table and one of them is leaning upon it it does not make any difference.

MARTHA. It does not make any difference if four are seated at a table and one is leaning upon it.

MARTHA. If five are seated at a table and there is bread on it and there are pomegranates on it and one of the five is leaning on the table it does not make any difference.

A landscape does not move nothing really moves in a landscape but things are there, and I put into the play the things that were there.

Magpies are in the landscape that is they are in the sky of the landscape, they are black and white and they are in the sky of the landscape in Bilignin and in Spain, especially in Avila. When they

are in the sky they do something that I have never seen any other bird do they hold themselves up and down and look flat against the sky.

A very famous French inventor of things that have to do with stabilization in aviation told me that what I told him magpies did could not be done by any bird but anyway whether the magpies at Avila do do it or not at least they look as if they do do it. They look exactly like the birds in the Annunciation pictures the bird which is the Holy Ghost and rests flat against the side sky very high.

There were magpies in my landscape and there were scarecrows.

The scarecrows on the ground are the same thing as the magpies in the sky, they are a part of the landscape.

While I was writing *Four Saints in Three Acts* I wanted one always does want the saints to be actually saints before them as well as inside them, I had to see them as well as feel them. As it happened there is on the Boulevard Raspail a place where they make photographs that have always held my attention. They take a photograph of a young girl dressed in the costume of her ordinary life and little by little in successive photographs they change it into a nun. These photographs are small and the thing takes four or five

changes but at the end it is a nun and this is done for the family when the nun is dead and in memoriam. For years I had stood and looked at these when I was walking and finally when I was writing Saint Therese in looking at these photographs I saw how Saint Therese existed from the life of an ordinary young lady to that of the nun.

Anyway I did write *Four Saints* an Opera to be Sung and I think it did almost what I wanted, it made a landscape and the movement in it was like a movement in and out with which anybody looking on can keep in time. I also wanted it to have the movement of nuns very busy and in continuous movement but placid as a landscape has to be because after all the life in a convent is the life of a landscape, it may look excited a landscape does sometimes look excited but its quality is that a landscape if it ever did go away would have to go away to stay.

In *Composition As Explanation* I said nothing changes from generation to generation except the composition in which we live and the composition in which we live makes the art which we see and hear. I said in *Lucy Church Amiably* that women and children change, I said if men have not changed women and children have. But it really is of no importance even if this is true. The thing that

is important is the way that portraits of men and women and children are written, by written I mean made. And by made I mean felt. Portraits of men and women and children are differently felt in every generation and by a generation one means any period of time. One does mean any period of time by a generation. A generation can be anywhere from two years to a hundred years. What was it somebody said that the only thing God could not do was to make a two year old mule in a minute. But the strange thing about the realization of existence is that like a train moving there is no real realization of it moving if it does not move against something and so that is what a generation does it shows that moving is existing.

Anyway the play as I see it is exciting and it moves but it also stays and that is as I said in the beginning might be what a play should do.

Anyway I am pleased. People write me that they are having a good time while the opera is going on a thing which they say does not very often happen to them at the theater.

So you do see what I have after all meant.

And so this is just at present all I know about the theater.

Thank you.

Curtain.

A TENDER MIND

The Life and Times of Lew Welch, Beat Poet

A Play

PROGRAM NOTE

The Beat Generation poet Lew Welch, born in Phoenix in 1926, disappeared with his pistol into the foothills of the Sierras in California in May of 1971. His body was never found.

With minor exceptions, these are his own words—gleaned from interviews, recorded talks, poems and prose pieces, including his correspondence. His last poem, “Song of the Turkey Buzzard,” heard in the play’s final moments, is understood today to have perhaps foreshadowed his disappearance and the manner of his death.

Lew Welch is a handsome, tall and rangy man, with an energetic commitment to making himself, and the scenes he describes, vividly clear. He is, among other things, a performer and relishes being in front of an audience.

The set is an arrangement that might include a lecturn, a comfortable chair, a window, and variously suggest a classroom, a living room, or some of the interiors and exteriors described in

Welch's narrative.

Each sequence will vary with the content, but an underlying through-line is that Lew Welch takes evident pleasure in his ability to cut through preconceptions and make himself and any subject he speaks about clear to others. With an explosive exception or two here, he is a smiling, genial, affable presence.

In the intervals between the scenes, the light on stage can change, and music and/or ambient sounds to be decided by the production principals may be heard.

LEW WELCH

(taking the stage)

Hello, hello. Just so that it's clear what I think all of this is really all about, let me say this right away:

I'm very smart, and over-educated, and so on, but you know—and I can make all kinds of points about *that* kinda shit—but what I really would like to do is: Wouldn't it be wonderful to write a song or a story that anybody would say at his hearth on any given evening just because he loved the way it went? That's what I want to do. And I think that that is what poetry is about.

[a moment]

My mother was the daughter of a very famous surgeon in Phoenix. Their friends were President Hoover, Alan Campbell, the Goldwaters. So you have the proud-born only daughter of a family, the Brownfields...and she married a man named Lew Welch.

He was called Speed Welch because he was very fast in high-school football. In Redfield, Kansas, he was a very good football player. And how he met my mother I have no idea but he was very handsome. He looked like Tyrone Power and Cary Grant. My mother naturally fell terribly in love with him. She really loved my father. It was a good love match. My mother had all the money, however. He didn't have a nickel.

He was the kind of guy that would play in the high sixties and low seventies in golf and knew everybody and didn't have a nickel unless it came from my mother. And she held onto her money.

[a moment]

My mother's *father*, Bob Brownfield, was probably the best surgeon in the West in 1920. He knew more about the problems of

cataracts than anyone. He operated on something like four thousand cataracts in a year and few had ever done forty in a whole lifetime. He would write papers about it and they would get published. Here it is 1910 and he was the first cat to want to buy an airplane.

You know what happened? My grandfather, Bob Brownfield, and his wife, Edie, and the Goldwaters, the parents of Barry, went to a country-club dance. And Bob had an operation to do the next morning and he didn't drink a drop. He said, "Please let me drive." And Mrs. Goldwater said, "I'm alright, I'll drive." Bob Brownfield couldn't win the day and she drove. She made a mistake, rolled in a ditch, and he was dead at thirty-eight years old. His neck snapped.

And Mrs. Goldwater was so ashamed of herself. (Barry Goldwater was my mother's schoolmate, about two years younger. He was a fat little Jewish boy that nobody liked. Spoiled rotten. The only Jew in Phoenix. The whole bit.) And Mrs. Goldwater would rather have died herself than to have killed Bob Brownfield. I have whole books by Bob Brownfield. Short stories he wrote. They are terrible. But he was in there working. And he was a goddam good doctor.

[a moment]

My father, Lew Welch (I'm a junior), was the son of a very simple Kansas farmer and his wife. Real good, straight, go-to-church-every-Sunday Kansas people. My grandfather had lost four fingers on his hand. He was a fuck-up. The Welches were fuckups. My grandfather was respected and loved by everybody in his county, but you wouldn't want to take him on a dangerous mission. That kind of thing.

They finally made Frank Welch—that was his name—they finally made him a district judge because they respected him so much. They knew he could not make an immoral decision about anyone. He would be a great judge, even though he was stupid enough to cut all his fingers off on his right hand in an accident on the farm. And he always sold the land cheap when he should have sold it dear. And his cows always died.

And no one ever pretended he ever read a book. He never did.

[a moment]

His son, my father, was so bad you can't believe it. My mother's family gave him a job as a teller in the bank, after which he promptly embezzled money from them. The reason he was a teller was because my mother got hot pants for him. He comes in and she can't believe it. And when the dance is through they're married. Only thing they can figure, is give him a job.

My grandfather would have seen that this man Lew Welch was a phony. But he was already dead.

[a moment]

Now. This is very important: I went to the loony bin when I was fourteen months old. Even among my Beat Generation friends I have the world's record. I copped out, said "I don't want it," when I was fourteen months old. I'll tell you why.

My mother was a twenties flapper, pretty, and high-style, who had little breasts and probably taped them down. Anyway, there wasn't enough milk and I refused to eat.

When I was six, I remember her sticking enormous bowls of oatmeal in front of me. It was disgusting. She'd scream, "Eat!

Eat!” I still have trouble eating. I’m a classic case of the alcoholic with an eating problem.

It’s awful to be born to a rich, selfish shiksa, but there’s a positive side to it. All I have done correctly in literature, if I have done anything correctly, was done because I resisted a terrible mother, who was the absolute form of Kali, of death. Even her pets die inside of a year or two.

My need was frustrated, but maybe because of this I admire all of the great feminine traits in the world, like the mountains.

If you spend as much time on the Mountain as you should, She will always give you you a Sentient Being to ride: animal, plant, insect, reptile, or any of the Numberless Forms.

[Afterthought]:

What do you ride?

[a moment]

This is how I got started....

I was really freaking out...I was on a \$600-a-year track scholarship, wearing the saddle shoes, a fraternity boy at Stockton Junior College. And I have all that going for me...fraternity houses where I can't get laid...my head's breaking...and I had to talk to this man who is named James Wilson and is now a teacher at San Francisco State...a very dedicated teacher, one of those rare men who regards teaching as an art. He really got through to me and I had to talk to him. I don't know what I wanted to say to him...you know how it is when you're that young. I go into his office and he's not there. His desk is very littered and there are lots of books and most of them are open and I decide I'm going to sit there and wait until he comes back, no matter how long it takes.

I picked up a book called *Three Lives* by Gertrude Stein and I read "Melanctha." And I became a writer. It's the damnedest thing. It's like Malraux reports in *The Voices of Silence*: "We are brought to art by an artist. We are not brought to art by a natural wonder." I read "Melanctha" and the impression was really wonderful. She's not so hard to understand. Everyone has been telling me that Gertrude Stein was "A rose is a rose is rose..."

...Anyway, there was this moment in my life reading this one

story and I suddenly said: “Goddamn, writing is not only a good thing to do, it is very easy. The thing you have to do is to put your words down absolutely true like Gertrude Stein is doing here.” It wasn’t so much that I loved the story better than other stories, or that I liked the writing more, it was a moment of revelation. A vision.

[a moment—
switches posture]

Not so many years later I’m working for an astonishing sum of money at an advertising agency in Chicago, I’m married, and live in a very peaceful, huge, five room apartment. All is low and spare and Japanese/Bauhaus.

This is how I’m living in Chicago: The alarm clock starts me. I have a hangover. I am nauseated all morning. The tooth paste frequently makes me heave. I can’t keep down orange juice, toast, and tea. I chew gum and go to my car dressed in a suit and a tie. I fight idiots who don’t know how to drive on a highway where thousands of cars go too fast and all the signs, streetlights, and policemen are confused and wrong. The car is old and unresponsive. Dies frequently and whistles in its generator. At the office I do the urgent, not the important. A friend describes it as “pissing on small fires.” The meetings are not to be believed. All

day long I am humiliated by inferior people who insist that I must do something in less time than it takes, and when I do they change it, making it only different, not better, so that I have to do it all over again in even less time. It never should have been done in the first place, anyway. Then I come home. The same idiots that can't drive are now as furious as I am. We try to kill each other for 30 minutes. Then I am home. I have a cocktail. I have 5 more. Finally I am back in the room. Dinner is served (delicious, my wife Mary is a fine cook) but I am so loaded and sick by this time I only nibble. Very insulting to Mary. All women deserve big eaters. All men deserve to get huge girth and to pat it proudly. Then to bed with good love if I am capable. Usually I'm still in a rage and/or passing out.

[a moment]

I get this poem in the mail from my former classmate at Reed College—which is where I went on the recommendation of that teacher, Jim Wilson, when I decided to be a writer—I get this poem from my Reed classmate Philip Whalen, about whom I've suddenly been reading in newspapers and magazines. The poem goes:

I can't live in this world
 And I refuse to kill myself
 Or let you kill me

The dill plant lives, the airplane
 My alarm clock, this ink
 I won't go away

I shall be myself—
 Free, a genius, an embarrassment
 Like the Indian, the buffalo

Like Yellowstone National Park.

Isn't that a killer? And like it's written to me? I circulated it at work and got an amazing response even from the least initiated. There are requests for copies... 'I'm going to sit here like Yellowstone National Park' is understood and enjoyed as a common expression by about a hundred people.

[a moment—
 looks away, looks back]

I lived here nearly 5 years before I could
 meet the middle western day with anything approaching
 Dignity. It's a place that lets you
 understand why the Bible is the way it is:
 Proud people cannot live here.

The land's too flat. Ugly sullen and big it

pounds men down past humbleness. They
 Stoop at 35 possibly cringing from the heavy and
 terrible sky. In country like this there
 Can be no God but Jahweh.

In the mills and refineries of its south side Chicago
 passes its natural gas in flames
 Bouncing like bunsens from stacks a hundred feet high,
 the stench stabs at your eyeballs,
 The whole sky green and yellow backdrop for the skeleton
 steel of a bombed-out town.

Remember the movies in grammar school? The goggled men
 doing strong things in
 Showers of steel-spark? The dark screen cracking light
 and the furnace door opening with a
 Blast of orange like a sunset? Or an orange?

It was 5 years until I could afford to recognize the ferocity.
 friends helped me. Then I put some
 Love into my house. Finally I found some quiet lakes
 and a farm where they let me shoot pheasant.

All things considered, it's a gentle and undemanding
 planet, even here. Far gentler
 Here than any of a dozen other places. The trouble is
 always and only with what we build on top of it.

There's nobody else to blame. You can't fix it and you
 can't make it go away. It does no good appealing
 To some ill-invented Thunderer
 Brooding above some unimaginable crag...

It's ours. Right down to the last small hinge it
 all depends for its existence

Only and utterly upon our sufferance.

Driving back I saw Chicago rising in its gases and I
knew again that never will the
Man be made to stand against this pitiless, unparalleled
monstrosity. It
Snuffles on the beach of its Great Lake like a
blind, red, rhinoceros.
It's already running us down.

You can't fix it. You can't make it go away.
I don't know what you're going to do about it,
But I know what I'm going to do about it. I'm just
going to walk away from it. Maybe
A small part of it will die if I'm not around
feeding it anymore.

[a moment]

Now I'm breaking up my marriage. There is no
explaining large parts of it, except that whenever the confining
walls of daily events become at all strong it terrifies me, or enrages
me, in short, threatens what it is that I call me, so that there is
nothing to do but shatter them and start all over again. In many
respects there was something perfect about the way it was with
Mary and me, certainly there was nothing she didn't give me that
was at all in her power to give. At any rate it got to feel as if I were

being killed—like it feels when you polish a poem or painting and slowly see it die, and stand frozen and worthless. If you had just stopped a few steps earlier it would have been alright. I suppose the psychologists will say I'm nuts, but there are many ways to live and I don't want this way.

In a few months I'm in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I drive a cab to pay bills. The big difference is that now it's not two souls all tangled together in nowheresville. I'm living in a cabin in Mill Valley with another classmate from Reed, Gary Snyder.

I drive home across the bridge in the fog and realize that a day's work should leave a person with more dollars than he had when he started. I told this to Snyder who woke to piss (it was 3:30 AM). He returned to bed horrified: "Failure to understand that is disaster," Gary said.

[a moment]

Now you find you have to say to your cab-driving, pool-playing buddies that you are a poet sooner or later. You have to tell them, you have to let them in on it, you have to. Otherwise you are cheating them of your friendship. And when you do, you get this: "Mm-mm, uh-uh, oh, yeah..."

Anyway, I told them at this pool game. I said, "By the way, do you know that I am a poet? If you don't mind, I would like to read you one." And I read them "After Anacreon."

When I drive cab

I am moved by strange whistles and wear a hat.

When I drive cab

I am the hunter. My prey leaps out from where it hid, beguiling me with gestures.

When I drive cab

all may command me, yet I am in command of all who do.

When I drive cab

I am guided by voices descending from the naked air.

When I drive cab

A revelation of movement comes to me. They wake now. Now they want to work or look around. Now they want drunkenness and heavy food. Now they contrive to love.

When I drive cab

I bring the sailor home from the sea. In the back of my car he fingers the pelt of his maiden.

When I drive cab

I watch for stragglers in the urban order of things.

When I drive cab

I end the only lit and waitful thing in miles of

darkened houses.

And they stopped chalking their cues, and they stopped playing, and they really started listening . And when I finished, they said, "Goddamn, Lewie, I don't know whether or not that is a poem, but that is the way it is to drive a cab."

I said, "Thanks, I am just testing it."

The thing about poetry that is usually wrong is that the people who tend to be writing it are not poets. They don't know what their tribe is speaking. You have to go out into the street and listen to the way people talk. You have to really listen to the kinds of things that people say. You have to listen to the birds that are in the air, the helicopters, the big rush of jets.... You have to have your ears open.

You have to hear how your mother talked in a way that is so straight that it will almost kill you. Not only what she said, but how the language moved in what she said. And how the language affected the people around her.

I had the privilege of seeing a poem of mine pasted in the No Name Bar window. I was asked by the owner of that bar to

partake in a small demonstration to protest against the misuse of the beautiful area that the city of Sausalito is. You have this gorgeous beach that is nothing but asphalt and parking meters. He wanted me to write a prayer and say it. And then it was pasted in the window of the bar for the people on the street to see.

Sausalito,

Little Willow,

Perfect Beach by the last Bay in the World,

None more beautiful,

Today we kneel at thy feet and curse

the men who have misused you.

[a moment,
stands up again]

New Chapter: (1) Got a job I finally liked, being a rubber-cutter at the Bemis Bag Factory... --it was like cutting out very complicated linoleum blocks. I was good. The knife was a joy. Then they fired me because I guess I'm too crazy. I was really hurt. (2) Finally decided I cannot understand, control, or relate to, women. It just brings me down. I don't enjoy them physically unless I'm flowers-up-my-ass in love, and then I don't enjoy them

because it all gets unreal and I hate them for killing something in me they never wanted to kill, and they hate me for moping around...I have always had a weird D. H. Lawrence-idea about being saved by a great woman, and it is all the worst kind of SHIT!

[surprised at his own vehemence;
more quietly:

Realized also I have no control of mental states, no ability to remain in any one very long, no desire for such control. Am almost certainly mad, KooKoo, most of the time.

[a moment]

Back in San Francisco, with a guy named Bill Yargas, I get involved in salmon fishing.

Fishing is hard work, from 4 AM until midnight with few breaks. Machinery won't work & sea-lions steal your fish. Salmon are always not biting or are biting somewhere else. Fishhooks prick your fingers and knives slip, nicking your poor swollen hands.

However, it is altogether beautiful & wild. You gradually reach a state of near nirvana:

...gladness as remote from
ecstasy as it is from fear...

Whales are always about. Albatross zoom around. Sharks sniff at the dimple the line makes as it cuts through the water. The boat becomes an extension of your body—a super tool as close to you as muscles are—as eyes are. It’s a strange encasement in an object suspended in the living void: just as being encased in our bag of skin is.

The boat was cranky but worked on the whole quite beautifully. One becomes very fond of the boat.

By the way, if there’s anybody out there still wondering: this is called “adventures in poetry.”

[moves]

This happened to me at Big Sur after the salmon season had ended. I’d shared Ferlinghetti’s cabin with Jack Kerouac and his girl less than a year before, while I was with my girl, Lenore Kandel. Now I’m there alone, broken up with Lenore, really all broken up. And after some time in that place....Here it is:

I saw myself
a ring of bone

in the clear stream
of all of it

and vowed
always to be open to it
that all of it
might flow through

and then heard
“ring of bone” where
ring is what a

bell does

[RING A BELL HERE]

[bell reverberates;
Welch listens]

From Big Sur I make my way up the Coast to a place called
Forks-of-Salmon.

Everyone on this river was warm and generous to me. They
all insisted they'd make a real mountain man out of me in nothing
flat. That means I ate bear meat, Venison, Salmon, and got very
drunk quite often. In fact, I had to be very clever about refusing
drink. Me! But the fact was, there, I honestly preferred to be
sober.

I learned a great many things on that river but one of the strangest is: the plight of the Poet is partly our fault.

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE REALLY DO DIG OUR WORTH
AND OUR WORK. THEY REALLY WANT TO HELP AND
THEY DON'T KNOW HOW!

If we're so damned Creative, we ought to be able to solve
this problem for our people...

[a moment]

You know, I once took a guided tour through a California winery and the guide, a young man about 20 years old, droned away with his memorized speech of facts and figures, chanting them perfectly in that guide-chant all of us have heard, and suddenly he stopped and yelled, "Whose kid is that!" A small child was determined to fall into a 500 gallon vat of wine.

The force of real speech slammed right against false speech was startling as a thunderclap, and not because he called out loudly. I vowed never to release a poem of mine which couldn't at least equal the force of that guide's "Whose kid is that!"

Most kids by the time they get out of high school have been

very carefully taught for twelve years that they will never understand poetry. And they believe it the rest of their lives, some of them. And then some of them find that this ain't true.

What strange pleasure do they get who'd

Wipe whole worlds out,

*ANYTHING,
to end our lives, our*

wild idleness?

*But we have charms against their rage—
Must go on saying, "Look,
if nobody tried to live this way,
all the work of the world would be in vain."*

And now and then a son, a daughter, hears it

Now and then a son, a daughter

gets away

[a moment]

Woke up sick and old, in somebody else's bed

"somewhere in the Universe"

to a glass of orange juice, a note

(how she had to go to work and what
the phone and when,

Gloria X X X)

Warm glass of water in the bathroom strange towels
bottles, goo. Ubiquitous
crazy razor hopeless lady-blades

*“I don’t know who you are, but
I’m going to shave you anyway.”*

Diet pills in the medicine chest!

Check the milligrams, take the necessary dose
Forward! Into Day!

Damp, towel about my loins,
back to scented room, to
orange juice, to
Miracle!

(2 full inches left of Vodka)

[a moment]

I guess I finally really hit bottom on the alky trip—ended up
in the hospital malnourished and flipped out, body screaming for
peace of mind on bad death/suicide trips for the first time in my

life. I'm three weeks dry & have every hope I'm really off the sauce at last.

You know, up at Forks of Salmon I had a very lovely little cat named Stanley. And the one thing that really blew his mind was when I swept out the cabin, which I did very rarely. I was just kind of sloppy. He could understand everything I did, but when I started to sweep that cabin he'd sit there and watch me, man, and look at that broom and say, goddamn! And he really couldn't dig it. What's he think he is doing? He was trying to figure out what this thing was for that I had to do. And you really get zapped, you know, and you're really together with that animal. Like sometimes, like when he died—it was a very tragic thing and...

[a moment]

All right, I'm into it, I might as well tell you. This cat was out of sight, man. And he did things like he went fishing with me, and went hunting with me, and did all kinds of things, and he was my only companion, and he was just a little cat that I found. He was about that long, and real skinny. I gave him his first full meal, and we really got along very well together. He always went out at night, but he was always there to wake me up in the morning. He jumped on my chest, and put his nose right here, and stared:

—“Come on, man, it's now day”—you know. Then one morning

he wasn't there and I didn't worry too much about it. And I got up and cooked, and I heard this pitiful cry—and Stanley was sitting by the porch, with his tail bitten off, his rear leg crushed completely, no bones at all, and his offside front leg also crushed like that, and a big piece of fur about that big ripped off his back, leaving the under-skin so there wasn't any blood or anything, you know, just ripped off like you might rip off a piece of wallpaper. Terrible shape. I don't know how he ever got home, or whatever got him. My best guess is that it might have been a big gray squirrel, because it wasn't a predator. If it was a bobcat or something, it would have eaten him, you know. But this was something simply wanted to mutilate him, and did. And gray squirrels do do that.

So I picked him up, and put him on the bed, and I was horrified, you know, and he started purring, and looking at me, man, and it just blew my mind! And so I fed him a little bit, and he thought it was over; this terrible thing that had happened is now solved. "I'm home," you know. So now I've got it, and what am I going to do with it. And so I went over to the old man next door, and talked about it, and he said, "Well, you can take him to the vet in Yreka, and he might pull through, but what are you going to do with a two legged cat, especially when the two legs are on the offside, and he doesn't have a tail anymore [oh, he had the most beautiful tail, big long tail] and so he won't be able to run right at

all? It's just going to be a bummer. And besides he won't make it anyway." Which was pretty clear. His ribs were crushed too. So I had to shoot him.

You know, that's one of the things that's important about living in the real world, instead of this one that we're sitting in at the present time. In the world that we're sitting in: If you have a dearly beloved pet, or let's say you give birth to a Mongolian idiot, or any one of the natural tragedies that occur to all of us—you simply phone, and make an appointment, and get rid of it, one way or another, don't you? In the woods, in the real world, you have to shoot it, or bury it, or keep it. It sure makes a big difference. Like you really come against these things that happen in your life. Anyway, I just sat there and aimed the gun at him, you know, and I decided I'm not going to shoot him while he's looking at me—he's got to turn his head—and he looked right at me, and he knew exactly what a gun was because he used to hunt with me—and he deliberately turned away. Pow!—right through the ear. That was it...Jesus, it was too much.

[a moment]

If you spend as much time on the Mountain as you should, She will always give you you a Sentient Being to ride: animal, plant, insect, reptile, or any of the Numberless Forms.

In Marin County, up on Mount Tamalpais, I found my totem animal. I wanted it to be a cougar, you know. I'm a Leo. You guessed that by now. But you know what it was? A Turkey Buzzard. An animal that will eat anything, the correction to my particular malady as a finicky eater. Perfect karmic turn of the wheel.

I'm going to get off now. You've got to know when to get off. I learned that when I did a lot of poetry readings. I'll close with this poem, "Song of the Turkey Buzzard."

They smell sweet
 Meat is dry on their talons

The very opposite of
 Death

bird of rebirth
 Buzzard

meat is rotten meat made
 sweet again and

lean, unkillable, wing-locked
 soarer till he's but a

speck in the highest sky

infallible

eye finds Feast! on
baked concrete

free!

squashed rabbit ripened:
our good cheese

(to keep the highways clean, and bother no Being)

Hear my last Will & Testament:

Among my friends there shall always be
one with proper instructions
for my continuance.

*Let no one grieve.
I shall have used it all up
used up every bit of it.*

*What an extravagance!
What a relief!*

On a marked rock, following his orders,
place my meat.

*All care must be taken not to
frighten the natives of this
barbarous land, who
will not let us die, even,
as we wish.*

With proper ceremony disembowel what I
no longer need, that it might more quickly
rot and tempt

my new form

NOT THE BRONZE CASKET BUT THE BRAZEN WING
SOARING FOREVER ABOVE THEE O PERFECT
O SWEETEST WATER O GLORIOUS
WHEELING

BIRD

Blackout.

Lights up. Curtain call.