

# **Royalty at Rest**



**A sojourn amongst the pillars...**

**Paintings, drawings and thoughts  
while traveling in Europe**

**April thru Jun 2016**

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## Preface

There is always a reason for leaving, of course. Perhaps my apartment lease was up, and my new corporate landlord wanted to increase my rent by thirty percent. Or, could it be that after five years in my current re-location, now simply became the time, well, to relocate once again; or maybe my present field of vision had become too restrictive and that persistent itch to move along had blossomed to urgency. It certainly seemed that way, a sudden quickening of the pulse and thoughts, demarcating the present and the future as if it were absolute, with no obvious connecting bridge between what was a manifestation of the past and that murky potential of future options, now lying somehow fecund with invitation, if still unfledged, seemingly made inevitable by my choices. And yes, all those other things were also true—a perfect storm within which to begin traveling immediately.

I put into storage those things I thought I might wish to reclaim should I return, refused my newly exorbitant lease, said “Good-bye, but I may be back” to my friends, who are mostly artists and who are mostly fine people, and who were mostly unconcerned about my pending departure; but time, as we know, moves in only one direction, and in this case it had become a tide of both events and machinations, all seeming to push and then to carry me away. Looking back, it seems rather amazing to me that I was able to complete so much separation, as well as preparation for departure, within such a short period of time (less than two months, as I recall). Canceling one’s position within a particular social milieu is nearly as grievous a process as gaining one. Fortuitously, I was able to achieve my airline and early hotel reservations on the internet with an extreme economy of keystrokes, if not so much an economy of dollars, still, it all made the bargain seem well worth the expense.

I eagerly anticipate the day when I can punch in my travel coordinates, step into a transponder of some sort, and arrive, in what? minutes later, across the now infinitesimally small pond, in Amsterdam or Paris, or well, you get the idea. Arriving perhaps only just a little discombobulated, but still almost nothing compared to a trans-Atlantic flight like Seattle-London-Amsterdam, which is, even under the best of circumstances, a beast, of some sort.

My sense of disenfranchisement from the American political and cultural systems, which to me had by now become almost noxious in their ever-evolving formulae for repression and greed, had now ripened and the fruit of my ultimate disengagement from here was now plucked, and my journey had begun.





## Amsterdam

Amsterdam seems different to me. Maybe just like every new day on this earth—familiar yes, but precisely so? No. The things that could not get lost—Dam Square, the Queen’s castle (quite the dominion still, though I am quite sure she doesn’t live there, in these times not even a Queen could afford to heat a ten or twelve story stone fabtabulon times two blocks square), and of course the Bulldog dope emporium, though its lesser associate several blocks north, which was my favorite coffeeshop as it lies upon the path less traveled (two blocks from the Hilton on the same street) I could not find. But please, after roughly twenty-seven hours of either flying or waiting to fly, I did not expect much from my rational process; so, after finding the Hilton (again, it could not be misplaced) and heading in what I believed to be the right direction, I was not greatly surprised to be thwarted (either by geography or luck, or the gods forbid, this little bulldog no longer exists!). But, I am nothing if not persistent, so I will search again, or possibly ask at one of the still existing Bulldogs (as I have found out somehow during my later years that asking is quite often an opportunity to listen in those particular instances to the voices of the gods of knowledge, without whom one can flounder as one approaches the delirium of thinking: I’m probably right... I mean, really, how many times have I actually been wrong?). Well, I can testify from many, many years of experience that this time would just be one more of those—being wrong, I mean. How well now I understand, if there weren’t at least some minimum advantage to growing old, who would even attempt it?

While traveling in the European Union my usual choice for sleeping accommodation is a three-star hotel, booked ahead on the internet, so sight unseen except as described in words and pictures online. Often there is no elevator and sometimes the toilet is to be found at the end of the hall; but for the money and given the amount of waking time I actually spend there (mostly asleep, though I do generally play my flute here for a bit in the early evening, prior to the dinner hour, which happily falls somewhat later here in the old country, where the various and sundry “customs” have been moldering for centuries, and by now have taken on a kind of carapace of inevitability). And of course, it is these very subtleties that are bound-up inextricably within the fabric of every culture, making each one fiercely and nearly completely incomprehensible to the other. Except that we all are, in the end as well as in the beginning, people, our greatest commonality, which really makes no sense to deny; and hence, I believe our greatest opportunity of coming together to share our fortunes, both good and bad and all betwixt and between, because, well, why would we not?

Here is a marketplace where mankind and womankind come together to bargain and with all hope to strike a deal. Amsterdam and the Dutch have been most expert in these processes for many hundreds of years. There is no conscience in the marketplace, where demand meets supply, questions are not usually asked about whether it is moral or even reasonable, but instead, how much would it cost? Whatever it is that might be requested, in an international market, could likely be supplied. That is how our species has operated since we have begun to make notes about it, so it cannot be surprising that there is an inertial dynamic to the marketplace that has never been overcome, not even by war. People love to bargain, and I believe we can easily deduce from this basic trait that we both need and love each other; I mean, at our core, we do, though it often seems a most difficult bargain to strike.





But, I digress, I was about to describe what a typical day in Amsterdam for me is like. It is a fascinating city and, as an artist, I am nearly bewitched by its architecture, its marketplaces, its looming, narrow and fabled streets, and the North Sea audaciously stretching and reaching its frosty fingers into and throughout the city, framing and holding it enthralled by its icy definitions. It seems almost obvious why passion and lust have become an integral and necessary ingredient to the mix of this modern-day ancient city. Sexuality is, after all, the signal characteristic that has ensured, thus far, the continuity of our species; so, should it not be a primary focus of our attention and concern? And I am not speaking tongue-in-cheek! It is well known that a man has two heads, and his "little head" has very little judgment or discernment in general, so must be, somehow, socialized or even domesticated, if possible. And, if in fact this man with two heads cannot be constrained within this rather generous social restraint, then, well, we must be patient and wait for the next iteration of our evolutionary persona, as only this will or can, hopefully, guide us along a more salutary pathway.

But how can we coexist, man and woman, in this increasingly diffuse complexity of sexual and social interaction, until such time as that? We need each other sexually, and in many other ways, of course, but if there is an evolutionary imperative, it is our sexual response, one to each other, et cetera. This sexual response, one to each other, is so basic to our species that it could almost be considered a subconscious reflex to every human interaction—this is only natural, believe me. How could it be determined otherwise? We are born and then, eventually or immediately in some unique cases, we die, which could be understood as our mission, or at least our ultimate distinction as a being, I suppose; but what is it that drives us forward, us, as a species, I mean?

Well, it must be our sexual response, one to each other, as that is clearly the most compelling element in our common heritage, and without it there would be no going forward, period. So, why do we deny ourselves those pleasures of an easy conscience, along with our carnal satisfactions? This question almost makes me shudder! We were forced to exit the Garden, and then be forever marked by our shame. Fuck! This mythology, though perverse and disgusting in each of its various aspects, seems to command and direct our attentions to foolish and lowly standards of ignorance, accented by desperate repression and delusional guilt. Why do we not luxuriate in the universal privilege of being sexual, of being sensual, of being receptive, one to each other? I know, for myself, I am not apologetic about nor embarrassed by my erection, and I cannot imagine that any woman would feel apologetic about her orgasm, for instance, whether assisted or spontaneous, whether mutual or masturbatory, whether intra- or inter-sexual, trans- or ultra-sexual, as a response is a response, is a response!

Does this mutual and irresistible attraction, one for each other, mean we do not need to show respect for ourselves and for each other? Please! We are homo sapiens, right? The thinking beasts! We cannot deny this knowledge about ourselves, and further, it would be useless to do so. We are this way by the imperative of our evolutionary pathway (drawn upon our history with a random flourish, perhaps, but directed towards our own survival, certainly!). It could not be within our best interests to deny or reject this reality, as if we could escape our stripes, or step away from the responsibility of our genetic urgency. I am not in favor of guilt. It is a useless artifact of history gone wrong, and I think we would agree that guilt cannot change history. Our species has such an ignominious (if I may use this word, that in retrospect seems so applicable!) history of male sexual predominance, it behooves us, for a moment, to inspect the carnage. How do we, as a species, take responsibility for this result: the "me too" movement, for

example, which seems to add a new and more modern accent of disgust and rejection to these ancient tenets.

Our Neanderthal brothers, of course, understood their necessity—their dominion over our species' sexual prerogative—but perhaps even from this start they were beginning the process of sorting through the contrasts and the results of these tempestuous relationships, discarding their failures and rewarding their successes; but what a pity, these Neanderthals have lost their place in time and space, and are too far gone to be of service for counsel or even solace. So now, observe modern man: respectful (still a work in progress), sensitive (to a respectfully male degree, of course!), forgiving (formerly, not an option for most males, but now trending!), and not only willing, but wanting and needing to find an equity in their sexual response to and with woman (well, for this last, we are I think, perhaps, beginning the beginning!). But women are being cautious about this putative change in male character, and thus far, seem to be taking these ostensibly radical and optimistic changes by their male counterparts with a grain of salt, if the truth be known. But I believe, given the next one thousand years of demonstrable change by men (Come on, boys, we can do this!), along these more enlightened and hospitable lines of interrelationship communication, women, in their wisdom, would adjust to this new reality.

Our Neanderthal brothers may have well understood their own immediate necessities, but pushing this realm of understanding any further, at that time, was understandably probably not a high priority; but perhaps now, having advanced a little further along our evolutionary pathway, we are ready to reconsider these time-worn (worn-out?) tenets. We, as men, have loved the advantages we have had, of course, but the politics of sexuality are inextricably attached to and intermixed with our own more general sense of humanity itself; and so by this, our appreciation for and participation in life, our own and our shared experience of it with everyone else, is in constant play throughout these personal and cultural deliberations.

As soon as we begin to differentiate amongst ourselves, based solely upon our own or someone else's ideas about what those differences are, what import they may or may not have in the greater culture, and finally, who is responsible for whom, and how and for what reasons, then, we have begun to be ruled by a mythology of ideas, instead of, or in spite of, reality. And this mythology of ideas has captured our psyche, because I believe, for the most part, we are afraid: afraid to be alone, afraid not to be alone, afraid of tomorrow and yesterday, and death, of course. So, it becomes easy to believe that we (collectively, though historically there have been holdouts!) have yielded our responsibility for our own minds, their nurture and internal control. We are given this plethora of pre-confabulated ideas, packaged often as borne of the gods (or at least spawned by our forefathers, who have somehow become god-like to our lazy minds!), these mythologies, like "America is the best!" (plug-in your own place name and it works quite as well!), or "men are the natural heads of households" (never true, really, but still widely believed, like religion!), are taken with mother's milk, to become the sinew and bone of prejudice and bias, as it were. And until we have been well-indoctrinated by these cultural principles, we are not usually allowed out of the house, or hut, or cave. Yes, this did not just start a while ago, but has been going on, well, since we have been willing to call each other neighbors.

Given the load of nonsense (too often wicked and conflicting values) inherent in these cultural priorities, it is small wonder that we, as modern man and woman, are dazed and confused—bewildered, even.

Fortunately, I was not yet born during that horrible period called Prohibition and that ugly and farcical Temperance movement, but for me it serves as a crystal-clear example of ideas gone wrong! We have so many historical examples, as well as current instances, it seems pointless to catalogue them. But it seems clear too that if we as men want to change our relational aspect towards women, to begin sharing our lives as equal partners, in all that entails, we will need to begin these efforts taken with mother's milk, like everything else we are forced to learn from the beginning. Trying to un-learn certain behaviors, take cigarettes or misogyny per this discussion, is perhaps not just difficult, but for the greater part, impossible! I choose to gird my courage and forge ahead, but as we know other choices are available, and sadly, it seems taken up with more frequency.

Again, I aver that our sexual response, one to each other, in whatever relative combination (in an honest, respectful and caring manner, of course!), is still the strength of our species; and hope, of course, resides in strength, and optimism is born of hope, so then, our future, as twenty-first century men, can indeed be re-born, and our male children can finally become right with our female children, having been struck right from the beginning, taken with mother's milk. Not to jump ahead, but would not this be a timely and significant response to the "me too" movement? Our own male "I too" movement. I too am willing to forge ahead in this struggle for equality: equality for the sexes and for all marginalized peoples, and then, perhaps, we will have begun to advance again along our evolutionary pathway, as a species, always doing what we do best, following in a direction leading toward our better advantage, the synergy of this potential union, in equal measure, of the species. (Or am I merely positing my own delusion, disguised as insight, or even worse, an idea!)

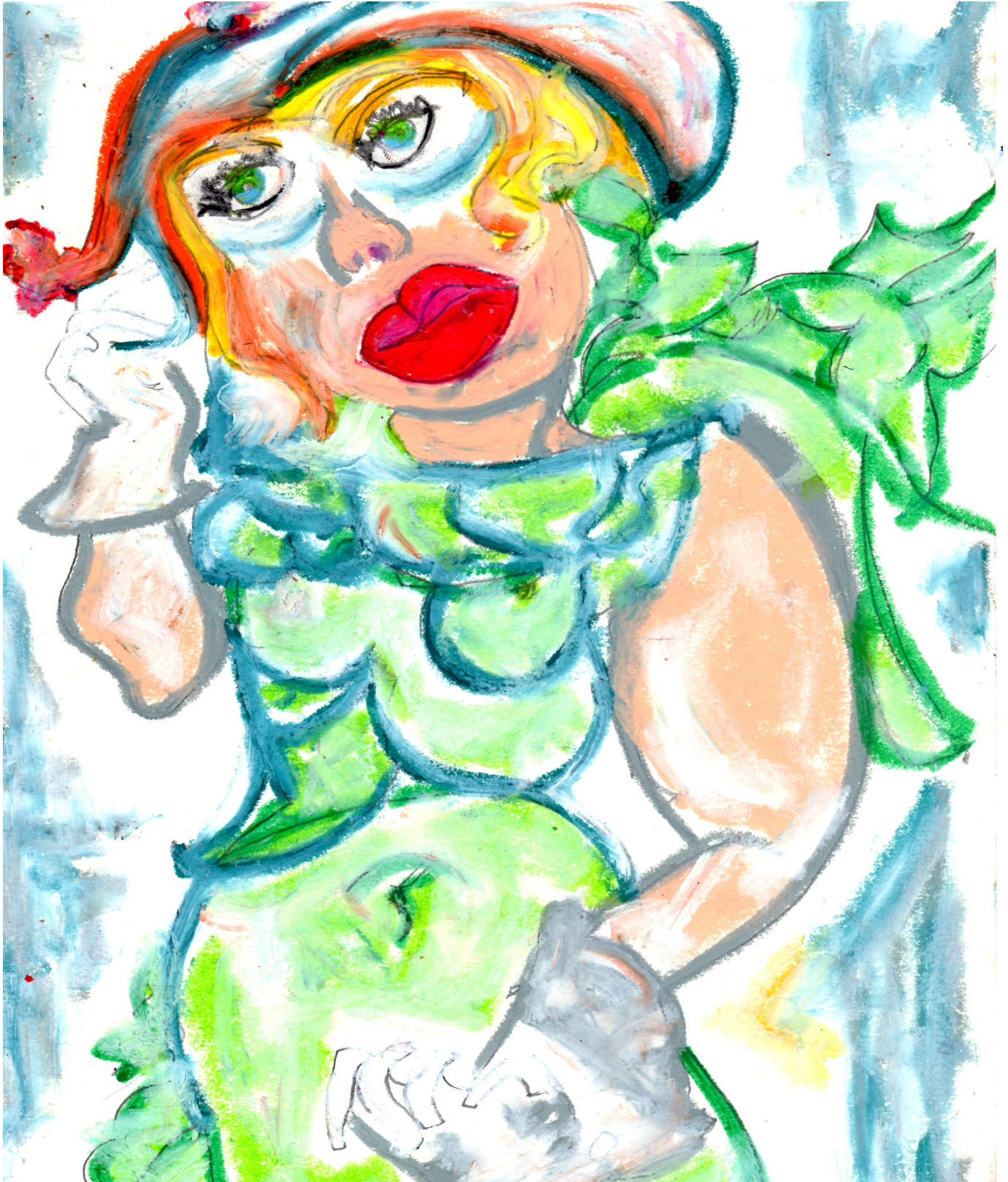
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And the Dutch people? Oh, the people are spectacular, with open faces that seem eminently ready to calibrate life in every aspect and demeanor; healthy and nearly rosy complexions, often strawberry and fading to blond hair, with blue-green eyes and a quick but tempered smile. These are business people from little ones to adults, youngest to oldest, all participating; and business here is serious (an aspect which in America has become almost a mockery of its own delusions, where I have been sick to death of it, and thus, I am here!). Though here, business is not a monster or bete noire, as it has become in some other places, at least not to my perception. It is a way of life, yes, but it is not life itself. The Dutch enjoy themselves, clearly appreciating each other, along with their wonderful museums, the arts in general, good restaurants and their families, perhaps in reverse order.

They practice a rather gentle but insistent socialistic governmental structure, which seems to have worked well for them, and continues to do so. They must be a very cooperative group of folks in order for this to work, as it seems to do so well, in this low-lying country of canals and bicycles and tulips. I remember once on a previous visit, sitting at an outdoor café table one morning, enjoying a latte and breakfast roll, when my raised eyes caught sight of a young mother riding on her bicycle through the sunlight towards where I sat slightly in the shade. She had a baby in a sack of some sort strapped and hanging across her breasts, a seeming two-year old girl (I think) perched snugly in a basket on the front, and a three to four-year old boy sitting quite happily it appeared back to back with his mother on the rear of the bike. She was, on that morning in Amsterdam as I can so vividly remember, a gloriously beautiful vision, and her children, who were themselves such an effulgent emanation of her essence (might I even

suggest the essence of Amsterdam itself!), served completely to make her even more beautiful. I remember she was dressed in bright colors which all caught and shared the early morning sunshine, and a notably short skirt. With each pedal she pushed, revealing the insides and depth of her strong and golden thighs, as the distance between this vision and my own shortened, my eyes were able to give to my imagination that paradise of quickened heartbeat and primal stirring of blood. And all of that, while simply sitting at a café table, in the awakening morning sunshine, in a quiet neighborhood of Amsterdam. I do very much like it here, but only as one passing through, I think, as it is for the most part too cold in temperature for me.







## **Allegiance**

First to family—the tree of grief from which  
We have all become a branch (or is it a twig  
Of insignificance gone to rage and pain  
Imagined or surreal, all the same, the blood  
Of life is never an easy flow). So, we can decide

To quit, to relinquish our consanguinity, not  
Expecting or experiencing any despair, or  
Worse, disrespect—for does not one proceed  
Autocratically from the other? From cant to  
Cant, to shit and then the all meaningful dust

Scuttled by the gods, a querulous and scurrilous  
Mutiny, defined best as a holy life, spent largely  
Denying and damning, dissuading the one from  
The other—for fun and profit and the occasional  
Fuck (good or bad, still a reminder of termination

And lost beginning, I would suppose) as if anyone  
Could ever really care about such things as  
Beginnings and such... When death is at hand and  
Playing the game of winning, who chooses to be  
Dealt-in, knowing the author of this stank will

Stomp your very heart into a mash of happiness  
And puke, protestations notwithstanding  
Compliments for the chef of this oeuvre—these  
Gods who disdain the urgency of survival

The audacity of happiness, the absurdity of

Filial amity. When one is starving, voracity serves  
As the only solution (offspring beware, succulent  
Tidbits have already been defined, and well...  
Parents never lose the taste for their children, just  
Ask those who are now lost and gone—whimpering

All along the way, as if they were all the while on a  
Path for righteousness, forsaken and now chagrined)  
But is there anyone who really cares? Anyone at all in  
This virtually nondifferentiated shit-pile? If this were a  
Cosmic question, would we not all be cosmonauts?

Circumnavigating our own ruts until they have all  
Been born into roots, from which we can begin  
Again, to do what? The same as before, but acting  
As a dimmer light, protesting these obscure injustices  
These shadows of evil, always militating against the

Surplus of lust and opportunity, until all that is left  
Is dust, and what little trust remains in life; and the  
Faith that blood will flow clean and clear from the  
Source is now as absent as today's dawn. Pertaining  
To family, one is but a dish at the table of vanity

And disgust to be gobbled as quickly as yesterday's  
Schemes have been extinguished by this day of denial  
So, let us pray that our endings can (or better still, will)  
Be as inconsequential as a mother's hiss: You better

Behave! But be brave my brothers and sisters, life

Can only end once; and for you, all there can really  
Be is nothing else, and of this I and we can be sure  
Destiny is deterred only by reality—truly a mirage  
Of circumstance and guilt...

I am no longer, really, a night person, though I have certainly enjoyed my own phases of the moon and those occasional wanton lights, and I must say in some cities on some nights my behavior can revert to its old proclivity. In my more recent times, I prefer to arise early, and my usual agenda is to get outside onto the streets as quickly as possible in order to make my sketches while the light is fresh and untainted by diurnal activity. There are hardly any folks up and about in these early hours, especially in the center of the city, as the people who are already there are not traveling, and the people who need to travel to get here have not yet begun—a perfect niche for finding a potential sketch and then making it, and so on. Drawing, for me, is not a process that will yield easily to interruption, but set against many interruptions, it cannot compete. I think my sketches are my attempt to interpret and perhaps partially capture a visual field: its energy, its culture, its moment in time held against and within the limits of my own understanding and ability. So, as you can see, I do take it seriously, but a process without joy would make a hollow sound indeed. And joy, to my mind, must not be taken seriously, but instead be a spontaneous eruption from within, without credential or agenda, as it were (art, as in most things of worth, has a bit of a dilemma lying at its core, I suppose). In the case of all of the sketches found in this book, I did not add color (or decide to refrain) until after my return to America (more about that forced journey later!), but all of the colors accrued from these early morning excursions remained safely secured in memory (well, if not exactly right, still, by feel precise!), until such time arrives for recalling and rendering my drawings complete. How the magic of this mental landscape works is a part of my reality at which I can only marvel and be thankful. It has not always been an ally, or even a friend, but it is as much and as integral a part of me as my own steps, until now, finally it has become a more comfortable, reliable and happy mystery.

Later in the morning, after the focus of my work has been shifted to the multiple foci of daily street-life, I find and take a light repast (there is much good food of every sort in every city center I have ever visited!), and then most generally set out on a walkabout (almost never forgetting a city map, but always with my writing journal and pens. I love to write: notes, letters, memoranda, essays, novels (unpublished!) and poems. I love languages, making the people's music of our cultures, generated and heard by the ensemble. Of course, there are many things to hate about ourselves, our species, individually as well as collectively; and yet, we do also possess, each of us, that remarkable duo of repentance and forgiveness; and by that, I mean, to and for each other, right here on this spaceship earth, not in some hyperventilated mythology of gods, and life after death in some nice (excuse me!) very, very nice place. Do not misunderstand my disbelief: religions are, each in their own way, spiteful, repressive and corrupt, that is a given; but if somehow, standing against all historical evidence, they could be seen to be in service of a much, much higher good, then perhaps all that has come before could be viewed merely as early, unfortunate errors made while bumbling along the pathway to righteousness. But what is this much, much higher good and how does it manifest itself, or is it forever trapped, syllogistically and sadly, within the very mythology that has given it birth? Anyway, it is nearly time to see about catching a train to Paris.

This on-foot extension and adventure into the city in every direction, as time allows, is always interesting and entertaining and often exotic and mysterious. The best shops and vendors to encounter are within the recesses, lying within the heart of the city. These are the spaces most highly prized by the artisans and vendors and least known about to outsiders. My advice? Become an insider as soon as possible. By now in my walkabout, it is mid to late afternoon and I find and enter a bar. I love bars, the people's

museums, a gathering place for emotions and grievances, friends and enemies, and merely nondescript folks, like myself. I have never felt unwelcome in a bar (well, sometimes by its patrons, but rarely), and I have frequented bars in many cities, in many countries, so I guess, I have come to think of myself as an authority, if such could exist in this arena. Why this devotion, you might ask? Because, simply stated, these are the places where I can write and the places where I do write. I enter and order a drink at the bar, and if there is no table in a corner or a niche available, which is my preference, I find a spot there at the bar, at one end or near an elbow perhaps, as these are common in old center of the city bars, ensconce myself within that small definition of space and time, and then allow myself to become a writer.

I write usually about something I have been thinking during the day and is now ready for transcription, or perhaps continuing something not completed, or maybe a poem (though these, for me, come more from anguish than joy, it is an avenue I travel regularly enough, as does the world, of course). After a day spent thusly and adding a little flute playing at the end, just to mellow the roil of the waters a bit, I have completed what I have come to know as my own ksj protocol. I do not always delight in it, and I do not always follow it per se, but this protocol has been my field of play for a decade and more, in variation of course, given life and its insistence; but I can happily answer that I do not plan to put it aside any time soon (and may all the gods be in agreement with this aspiration, please!). So, if at some point later in this book, you find a reference to simply my ksj protocol, you will know wtf.

And not to be overlooked, the Stedelijk museum (of design and modern art) is truly something the Dutch should be (and are by my observation) very proud of and it sits right beside the new Van Gough museum, which are among others two very good reasons to visit Amsterdam.







## Vanity

This at first innocent blush of self-appraisal  
Which too soon becomes proud and surreal  
Critical of perceived (or, perhaps, imagined!)  
Faults asks: whose are these supposed to be  
Not of one's self certainly, but centered

Upon and within the misperceptions of the other  
Who could not possibly understand the underlying  
Perfection and harmonies that one can easily presume  
Exist while observing one's own image, either that of  
Exterior or that of interior, there is nothing

Left on the table for others to defile, but all  
Is perfection, wanting only confirmation  
There can be no discussion necessary, for only  
A villain would hypothesize otherwise...  
Is there any possibility of truth? Yes, perhaps I am

A little too fat, a little too ugly—my spirit is  
Perhaps a little too mean? No, there is no room  
For such considerations as these, which have been  
Timeworn and discarded by each of us in his or her  
Own turn, in our own time, using our own means

Leaving no opportunity for error; for whosoever could  
Miscalculate in terms of one's own beauty and wisdom  
For that concern, who would care to love this kind of lie  
As if it were not even noticeable or easily



Reckoned for any with gifts of sight and sound

For who would dare move toward this audacity  
This recognition of self to other—none of us  
Would, of course, as truth has never been the issue  
We make ourselves beautiful to eye and mind  
With intent to avoid and obscure ourselves, so that

Dying may be accomplished without the need or  
Rationale of introspection. For it is within that  
Specter of doubt that a fear of loss and leaving  
Does arrive, without any measure of assurance  
That one has not strayed and cannot be found

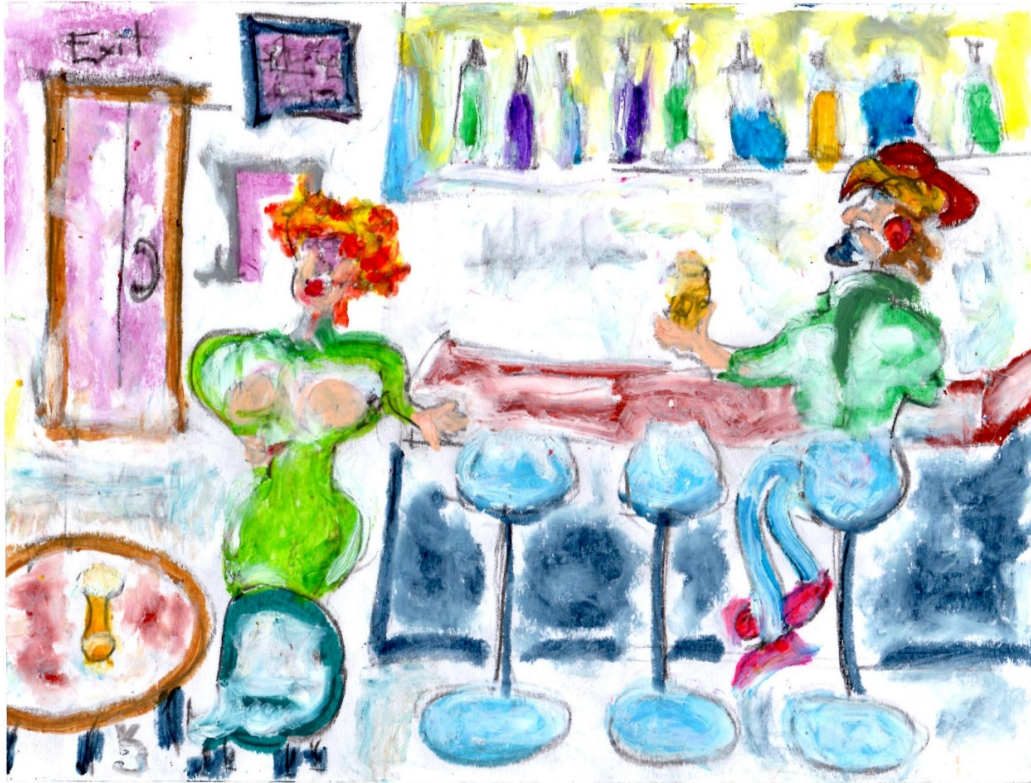
Because there is no one around who would care  
To search, much less to find, this stranger...  
This citizen of a Paradise lost

## Paris

The trains in the EU are a beautiful thing: economical, convenient in the extreme (unless there is a workers' strike going on, which in France occurs more often than a tourist might hope for!), and they go virtually everywhere. To travel by train, one needs a ticket and a seat reservation, both of which can be easily obtained at the train station (especially if one goes early in the morning when there are really no lines at all!). I love the fact that trains are almost completely self-service for their passengers. All the information you need is printed on your ticket: the train number, departure time, coach number and seat number. The only information withheld is the quay number from whence your train will depart, and this is announced and also appears on the electronic departures board some twenty minutes before the train is scheduled to leave. The passengers make their way, carrying their own luggage or perhaps assisted by a porter, to various departure sites, wait a moment or so for the boarding announcement, and then each makes their own way to the correct coach and seat and voila! Your journey is about to begin, and you did not really need to speak to anyone; and I must tell you the modern trains are comfortable and very fast, and one can almost always find a pretty good glass of wine or two.

Now, how could this arrangement be improved upon? Well, yes, the transponder would come in a mark or two above, but otherwise, I take my pleasure from the available garden. It is most common to see a broad sampling of everyone (except perhaps the very rich—who knows how they travel?): business commuters, entire families traveling for whatever reasons families travel, students going to and from school to home for holidays and visits, and of course tourists, though we were certainly in the minority to my perception. Internet access is available and cell phones of course, so there is always a hubbub of some very important persons being very important on their electronic devices, students and children playing games or working on school assignments, business folks laboring over brightly glaring spreadsheets or some intricate interoffice communication. All of us, caught-up and contained within that web of time and space, much more related to each other than we are likely to consider, sharing this definition of speed and direction, as if we were a four-dimensional vector being carried to our individualized futures, with a rigid internal reference that will upon reaching our projected destination dissolve, and then disperse into a multi-vectorized dissolution. So, maybe you can understand why I like trains so very much.





## **Boredom**

Such an absurd reaction to each breath  
As if upon taking the next one could cause  
A collapse back upon oneself. An assumed  
Crushing blow breaking the wind of self  
Creating a stench of other, contiguous and

Cruel, cancelling any sense of optimism or  
Possibility—like death, only just smelling  
Slightly better and perhaps lasting a breath  
Or two less; but who could tell with eyes  
Turned inwards, judging and then condemning

Unto disappearance until the hole of  
Accusation is large enough to receive the  
Corpse of aspiration, and though I cannot  
Be certain, I am here to believe that the  
Smell of loss and failure is left behind us

An eternal spring of vomit, still, a delight  
For the worms, and whatever eats the worms  
And whoever eats the eater of worms—truly  
A delight that can never dissipate any urgent  
Reaction to the natural retraction of self

As we struggle to crawl back through the  
Navel of emergence—the grand contraction  
Immaculate distraction, nasty and dark  
Much like the beginning of hell, except that

It is more like an ideal that can never be

Realized, for who would try and when and  
Why, as all reasons for things have long  
Departed upon the drifting nights of departure  
With no way left but out or in, never here  
Or even there, but just gone and would soon

Be forgotten, if someone was left here to  
Try to forget. But here has soon lost its  
Definition, leaving no place to stand  
But only a moment left in time to die  
Of boredom, certainly...

The train trip from Amsterdam to Paris is a short one. First a stop in Brussels (sometimes this requires a change of trains, but not usually), and then after another short while the train arrives at la Gare Nord in Paris (the northern train station in Paris, serving the trains coming from the north and going to the north, very logical indeed). It is always exciting for me to arrive here. I believe anticipation is a key to enjoyment. The savoring of that inexorable build-up of energy, anticipating a culmination of satisfaction and happiness (of some sort), and when I disembark and begin my first short journey to the taxi stand, which is located at the front of the station where the entrance to the city itself begins, well, I am invariably radiating anticipation. Will there be a long queue at the taxi stand (sometimes there is, depending on how many trains have just arrived from the north)? Did I make a good choice of neighborhood and hotel? How far from my hotel to a good bar will I have to walk (this critical question is usually the first one I consider after checking-in)? One of my all-time best selections as I recall was a small hotel, then being refurbished, very economical, on the left bank of the Seine close to the booksellers and just across the river from the Louvre museum, and where, some large amount of time prior to my arriving, Baudelaire labored during some period of his short life (another one for anguish, so naturally I immediately felt at home!). The new owners, a couple (one American and one French) were a bit short of solid facts regarding the provenance of this story, but history is so often designed to be unabashedly self-serving, why not accept this story at full faith and truth, I say!

Speaking of history, there seems to be such a profound blocking force, impenetrable by vision or insight, that in a near absolute sense denies to us what one must presume to be the glorious truth of our collective past. This is really, I believe, a deficiency of our species, not an individual or personal thing. There is some weird filter that disallows us as a species to feel or even to sense the emotional brunt of our past actions. We can, of course, read some facts, even some very atrocious facts, which have already been filtered and rationalized, and then we repeat that process ourselves, until finally we know the facts, but we do not or cannot feel the outcome. For example, when we read and even study facts about WWI, and most of these facts are quite atrocious, do we feel the anguish of WWI? No, of course we do not. And my proof of that? Well, I think WWII serves as definitive proof of that. So, we cannot really learn to act better by reference to our history, and my proof of that is our collective history since WWII. But, perhaps fortunately for our species, we do possess one trait in common, of course, and that is we care and feel inordinately passionate about our own life, maintaining and preserving it alone, above and beyond all other considerations. The strength and effect of this trait is so basic to our nature that we can generate and accomplish this result without really thinking about it too much at all.

Now, on the surface, this would seem like a very selfish trait, and indeed it is. But the key to appreciating the huge potential for unifying the species is that in order to be successful at maintaining and preserving my own life, and because we are of one species and therefore the same in most respects, it becomes absolutely incumbent upon me, as an individual, for completely selfish reasons, to care about and to care for, my neighbors—even to love my neighbors as myself (and again, I do not say this tongue-in-cheek!); for it must be true, and not to put too fine a point upon it, that if my neighbors are fucked, then too, I am fucked—it is only logical.









## Leaving

And making preparation to be gone  
It can be a short process: here, take  
These remains, used up and now  
Discarded; burn it up, scatter the  
Memories to the winds, to be blown

And buffeted—the redistribution of  
Best thoughts, now grown cold, or  
Callused by revision and regret—missed  
By none, remembered by the few, for a  
Few moments perhaps but certainly not

Fondly, but just maybe by the random  
And most likely true thought: well, we  
Guess, that was the best that could  
Have been done, given these dire and  
Damnable circumstances that we rather

Absurdly call life, as if it and death could  
Be held in separate hands, and then  
Poured into separate casks of stank and  
Pus and putrid histories. There is no  
Difference, only this and that and the

Other—all the same in the nothingness  
Of coming and going—an adventure only  
In the moments before this realization  
There may be a time, before this one

Perhaps, or after, when one could ponder

Such a thing as a thought held in the mind  
Or a love held in the heart, but who would  
Be left to remember or to anticipate such  
An occurrence? The constipation of hope  
And fear, like a game played by the ghosts

Who would have cared if only they could  
Have been, somehow, cared about. Memories  
Are filled only by blood and despair, and  
Lighted only by the reminiscence of hope  
That now lies dying upon its bed of reality

Gone now, replaced by its only possible lover  
Fear, an ally or exterminator—so why then  
Would one ponder these idylls of speculation  
And splendor, speckled by doubts and finally  
Enflamed by the ending that finds its home

Always, only right there, in the beginning  
As always, arriving and leaving simultaneously



This principle of considering harm as a reciprocal part of a common structure was indeed utilized by Sir Winston Churchill himself, not as explicitly as I state it here, of course, but at its heart the same. The European Union was established after WWII for the explicit reason of developing a common market featuring trading advantages to be held in common by all member countries. And who were these countries? Well, the countries in the European arena who had been engaged in the theatrics and demonic violence of wars for a thousand year, or so, among themselves and whomsoever else could be reached and befouled by this scourge of our species; and membership was not that exclusive, as there were no European countries who had not been infected by this madness, generation by generation, as it had become certainly by then a regularized aspect of this warriors' life. But implicitly and to Churchill's mind most importantly, after the establishment of this market and its explicit advantages had become integrated into the very fabric of these European warrior-cultures, the disadvantages of warring with each other would become so obvious and disgusting, abject and dismal, that this option would eventually diminish in its attraction, and perhaps even disappear from the lexicon of intra-European relationships; or more simply put, when our neighbors are fucked, then too, we are fucked. Rather amazingly, this post-WWII regimen has worked, really, quite well, and one needs only to view this period of intra-EU history as being war-free to be convinced of this.

That is not to say, of course, that the EU has not been war-like. The EU, along with its ally, America, has indeed waged actual war in various locales, in various world "hotspots," throughout this period, but not waged against themselves, which for them, is much more than a slight improvement. Again, I am not looking to history for a revelation of guilt or innocence, much less for wisdom or guidance; but rather, I stand beside Churchill, and within his aura of understanding, that what has happened before is now become even more likely to happen again. And this propensity for recycling the horrors of war, hatred and blame, are arenas of endeavor as likely to maintain their powers over our species, as our own sun is likely to rise each day and to set each night upon our horizons. So, it would seem, that a reasonable person, when thinking about the evolution of our species, should begin with this premise: that we are clearly destined to self-destruct.

Our weapons of war, and perhaps our intent to utilize them, have now overcome our abilities to survive their deadly consequence. And instead of this being a sobering, or even a terrifying, realization, it has become our rationalization for expanding and intensifying these already most terrible consequences, towards an inexorable logic of species extinction, at least one must suppose. It should, really, not be surprising that given this specter of obliteration, we have, as citizens of this world, as countries and continents, as cities and states, as families, become afraid. Afraid of what we do not know, often about what we really cannot know, and finally, afraid of each other, and most especially of the other whom we do not recognize, or as we have come to call it in America, "not in our tribe!" Of course, there is a glaring fallacy in these considerations, and that is: it is we ourselves who embody this failure, this apparent inability to coexist, one with each other, this continuing incapacity to communicate, even to organize ourselves without hostility.

Words and phrases like "brinkmanship," "collateral damage," "greater and lesser good" (as if calibrating good behavior, could somehow mitigate bad behavior!) have made their way into the lexicon of our international relationships, as if somehow by labeling this insane contingency of potential species-extinction with these words, it can rationalize and provide at least a semantic sense of security,

schizophrenic at best, and standing in diametric opposition to our collective well-being, but still, a position upon which to stand, metaphorically.

So, how does all of this bring me around to discussing my flute playing? I did not begin playing the flute until my mid-twenties. The flute I first picked up was owned by a former lover of mine, who had played it in high school (not well, but who does things well in high school?), and I co-opted it and began trying to learn how to play it. Those early years of training were a struggle, with the instrument but not with my psyche, as it mellowed and seemed to cure from the very start, while I was playing. The flute is a difficult and exquisitely complex instrument. Playing it involves dramatic keynote fingering positions and changes, breathing in harmony with your music, and most critically, intonation, which demands an intricate and intimate relationship between one's lips and the flute's embouchure, or mouthpiece (so much like a kiss!). My capabilities as a flute player were slowly won: day by day, week by month by year, it was not an easy journey by any measure, including social acceptance of my efforts, of course. But the rewards that I gained and gathered along the way have repaid my efforts in maximum reward, from the beginning throughout and up until last night, which is merely the last time I played.

I do not play for an audience, as that does not seem to be in my nature, but I have chosen to live mostly within the center of cities, in urban neighborhoods, where my flute playing is welcomed, or not, as just another ingredient added to an already crowded milieu of sound and activity. But I do have listeners, I know, though I rarely hear comments, I often get a nod or a smile from my neighborhood colleagues when out and about that could only have been earned by that, my playing. Blowing that silver tube-full of air out into the world, sending it out upon its own journey, to be heard and intermixed with other sounds and thoughts about those sounds, can feel to me like a joining, or melding, with the cosmos itself, really, at least as it is being expressed here, to me, in this tiny corner of what is reality. And for me, it is not less nor tiny, it is my expression for that moment of my most! And in that I do take some satisfaction.

Could not this journey, my journey of learning to play the flute and to find satisfaction in doing so, be viewed by some measure or meaning, as an allegory for learning to live one's life and finding satisfaction in doing so? We are, each of us, players in this game of life, marking our own measures of success (and failure, too, of course!), demarcating our own lines of commitment and determination; all of us, I believe, hoping and even striving to find some satisfaction in our efforts. So, all that is left for us to do, as individuals, as families, as tribes, as cities, as states, as countries, as continents... all that is really left to do is for us to find that sense of joining, or melding, with all of this mess, right here, right now, upon this our spaceship earth.

Simply because we, acting in the collective interests of our species, have never been able to achieve this sense of unity of purpose (and even unable to try, apparently!), should not be proffered as an excuse for not trying, should it? "I do not want to try to do that, because it is just too hard!" Really?

I do not believe that at this point in my life I personally could learn to play the flute if I had not begun to train myself until last night: there is just not enough time left, for me. Of course! This is taken to be true without equivocation; so, how can we as citizens of the world achieve this sense of joining, or melding, one with the rest, unless we begin to try, or in the least, try to begin, at the first opportunity presented to us, when there still might be enough time left to do so? There is a kind of dark irony at work here, when it is seemingly so very difficult to convince ourselves, to save ourselves, n'est pas? Would that be acting

outside the boundaries of our species and its inherent capabilities? Or, would this arduous and seemingly impossible journey become merely one more juke along our twisting and circuitous evolutionary pathway? Only time can tell us these answers, and I am not one to make predictions, at least not ones I willingly believe in; but I do believe in the laws of physics, or at least in as much of it as we understand (which seems a very small amount when held against the mysteries of the cosmos!), and because we are, as a species, bound-up within these same laws, it might be expected that we would somehow evolve some amelioration for a potent and possible catastrophe like this one? Perhaps, and this potentiality remains one of my best hopes, but I would not expect any of what we now hold to be the currency of our times to extend much into the future, or to last or be valued much beyond a very short while.

Change has been the basis for the evolutionary trajectory of our species, and so too, change has been and will continue to be the transforming agent in our social structures, this is only natural. But can we harness this dynamic of change to a harmony of purpose and intention, in time? We would need a curriculum, of course, that all the world's peoples could study, to help us prepare to learn; and very fine teachers (like the one whom I will encounter soon in my journey, in a small academy in Nice, but more about that later...); and very fine students, surely, because both would be required for learning to occur; and probably most essentially, a complicit sense of urgency to try to begin.





K



## Difficulty

Difficulty masks a myth perpetrated and perpetuated  
From (and to) forever by those who most likely have  
Never experienced any of it—I mean, real difficulty  
The kind that if one does not live it, connive with it  
Cheat and beg, and yes, even steal the comic King's

Pajamas, if available, only just to see the plight and  
To feel the heat of another day, to shit your piles  
To polish your stones, to breathe your little breaths  
The last I heard we are a joke, a token only unto  
Ourselves, measured just to keep this humorless

Tribe of apes from flailing upon our own stiffened  
Dicks or clits, equalizing this last daze with our first  
Veritable craze of curses, grunts and squabbling  
The smell of farts pervades the air, a vast diarrhea  
Sprinkled without prejudice by all the shit and piss

Of all the ages whose bowels could never be emptied  
So, what else could be said about this difficult job?  
Is anything more tenuous, but necessary, heavily  
Fraught with care and concern and numbing anxiety  
(especially, if not successful, that is) than shitting?

And while most anything in addition to this may  
Just be considered the stink that makes the rouge  
And brown hole so interesting and openly revealing

To our four-legged friends—there is much more to  
Be learned and perhaps said about this circumstance

Making so much of so very little is only a goal, all  
That is given in addition to this—shitting—is little  
More than stale afterthought, futile and shirking  
In vapid responsibility, echoing throughout the  
Emptiness and nothingness of people's minds

Bouncing from one node to another, taking full  
Charge of its trip to nowhere—showing concern  
Only for the avarice of love, while loving itself only  
As a negation of other—nodding about and dozing  
Through everything essential, like a flag flown for the

The blind idiots of the night, who stage a revolution of  
Of useless light whenever it seems impossible to see  
Yearning to be forgotten and aching for any definition  
Of doom, we are legion in our desire and single only  
In one success—death, and all left behind are not

Players but rather plagiarists, or more aptly, they  
Who copy life instead of shitting it, bewildered and  
Dumb. Are we left no choices? No opportunities nor  
Options for recompense? Yes, we are naught, again  
For who could be left to count our own sorrows—as if

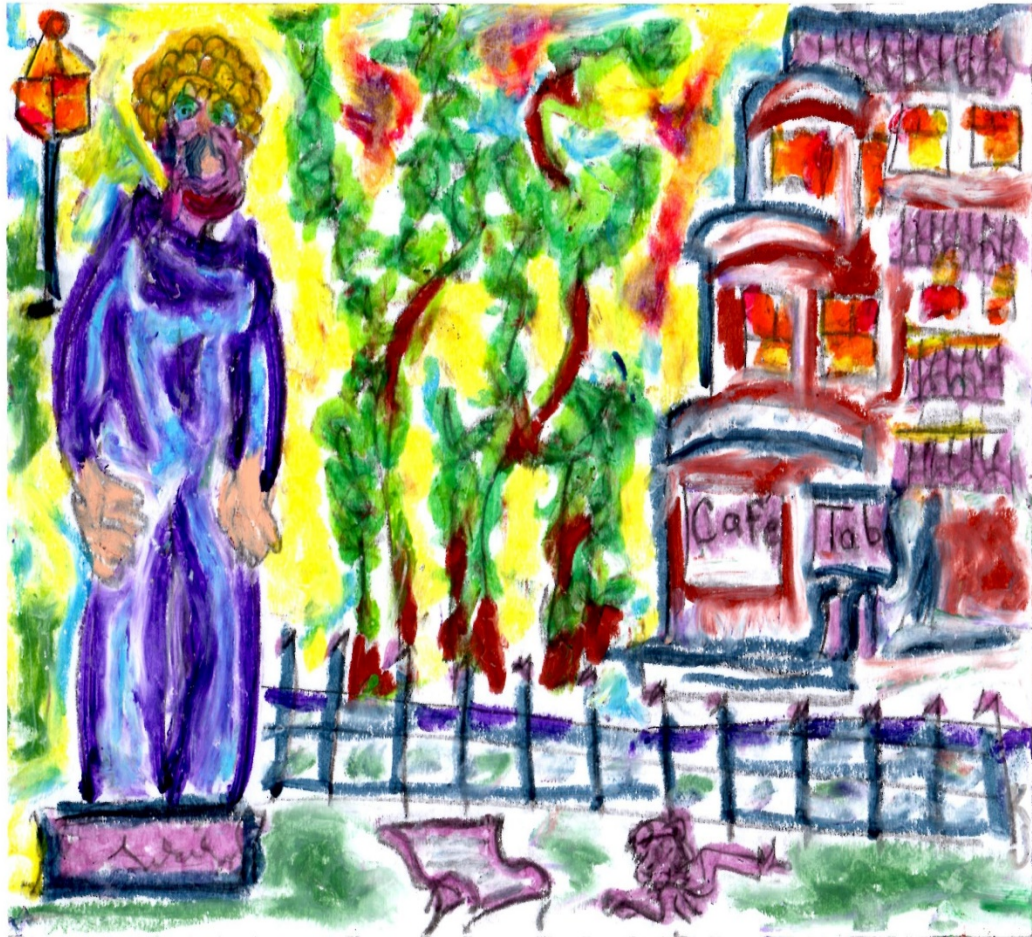
They were carrion birds to be shot down, their broken  
Wings serving to flutter and flop upon the rot and stank  
That is left to reside as a royal decree within all that

Ever was (and without, if only this difficulty could ever  
Be foretold with any accuracy or truth...)

Effete, malaise, hubris, these are French words which have been incorporated outright into the English language because, I must suppose, we had none to describe these precise French conditions. I often have thought in my review of the history between the French and the English: if they had had words of their own to describe conditions like these, then there would have been many fewer and shorter wars between the two. But I can guess that the fallacy of this consideration is that if they had had these words, it would necessarily imply they would have had the experience and understanding of these conditions, which, as we all know, is not the case. Of course, as I at least metaphorically understand: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction, which undoubtedly applies in this situation, too, n'est pas? Ah, and now we are back in the devil's playground, the details and comprehensibility of social interactions.

...

I love to sketch statuary. Not only do they serve well as models, from every stripe of life and geographic coordinate, but are usually most stately and beautiful, caught-up often in heroic action or desperate gambit, and finally, and best of all, they are a reservoir filled with cultural artifacts, with its full array of genius and madness. I like to think about that underlying culture, about that sculptor and his thinking about his or her work, and now, my thinking about all those who have seen this sculpture since its birth; and then, when I touch charcoal to paper and begin to sketch, I have become a player in this continuing story of call and response. So, I always search out statuary wherever I visit, as a pleasure, an avocation, or maybe just an opportunity for communication, with all of that thinking.







## **Walking away**

When one steps away, perhaps to think  
For a moment, to reconsider one's failures  
(Or purported success?) there ensues a  
Kind of urgency, as if a decision which has  
Not yet been made is pushing or pulling

Toward the precipice of defeat: for therein  
Lies the true meaning of life, that is to say  
After it has begun, there is only an end in  
Sight, infecting the mind, inflecting all the  
Actions that in futility seek to accomplish a

Life (that damnable excuse for breathing)  
Why is it? This question which is at the root  
Of absence and always at the beginning of  
Arriving. Will you smile if I say I remember  
That first slap on the butt? Rude and nasty

Without prelude and inexplicably without  
The warm and wet harmonies of the womb  
Where we all wish (or hope?) to return, even  
As the end engulfs our expectations, superseding  
Any and every rational process; yet still, we try

We reason, we beg and we cry to be received once  
Again, into that wanton darkness of oblivion, balanced  
Upon all refusals until we are swept away, engulfed  
Safely again into the nothingness that once exposed

Our charade—inexorably pushed towards that

First step which is this—always gone when we  
Search it out, always smiling in that rictus of  
Welcoming—a smile that will haunt our memory  
Until that memory has hardened into the disgust  
And despair of that eternal yesterday. So, bear up

Chew the cheeks of resistance; until yes, we are  
Ready to step away... second chances are no  
Longer needed. In this, our ultimate and absolute  
Loss, we are all winners. So, I can smile a little bit  
In advance; after all, this shit is gone, what possible

Difference could it matter, as I walk away...



We ourselves could be thought of as sculptures, living sculptures. Our creation beginning at birth and the work ending only when life is snatched away from us. Each minute, each hour and day adding its own marks of identity, joy and despair, until all in final tally, announce a life lived, another sculpture struck true. I suppose each of us should be seen in our respective, full and ancient lights, standing within the aura of our families, our experiences, even our ancestral families and their experiences, and then, only then could we determine the inherent worth, guilt or even innocence, if this conjecture has not already been banned from our lexicon of life. I do not search for guilt in history, nor for innocence amongst today's heroes, though some are good, few are wise; and how can even simple wisdom guide fools? And that seems an unmistakable credential for these times, a rather sad credential for an epitaph. I would much prefer: once foolish, but now wise; or, once taken by surprise, but now forewarned. Never before, and perhaps never again, has such an opportunity presented itself to humankind; or is that just tomorrow come calling, asking for our plan, for our future?





## Absence

Being gone, or having one be gone  
Is there any difference? From here to  
There or is it from there to here—blown  
To bits by shattered time and dreams  
As if that could be a thing to carry along

With, or to exchange, or to rearrange and  
Then redistribute, in the coin of the land  
A mask of beneficence, until of course  
The end recaptures its dust and scrapes  
Clean each of these memories of false

Presence, as if anything could be real within  
These shadows of nothingness, while in the care  
Of absence; as if the dust of disappearance  
Scattering across the fields of death is now  
At rest, its work done, its vengeance of

Perfection, dreamed and then lost  
Is now complete. Perhaps, it was only a  
Fool's paradigm: are we then, now happy  
To be at last at rest and away? Not today  
Can be the only answer, as if any answer

Is necessary, for it must be true that death  
Carries along its own progeny, sweeping away in its  
Train of absence, each of these questions. So, who  
Or what, could have a need for anything, at all?









Paris seems just the same, if perhaps a little more faded—its prime during Napoleon is long, long past, and its former glory has waned apace. The rhythm of the city is still just as vibrant—even more so, probably (I am older!). The Parisiennes seemingly just as content and always in a hurry toward their next rendezvous. I do not judge, as certainly I remember being in a hurry, really for no discernible reason, but the rhythm, again, catches a tune with the soul and the city, together—a harmony of cacophonous joy and sadness—and everything else, of course, but life does not exclude—it is always an open opportunity. The very density of the populace of Paris is innocently familiar and yet crushingly foreign, friendless and opaque to an outsider. I did not like to see that on every corner (almost!) there was a beggar, looking very authentically to be desperately in need—but somehow this business model beggars my own sense of credibility. The very poor will try any and every job, until one seems to work, as jobs per se must do. It only seems a wonder that these folks can keep this market, such as it is, cornered, as it were. I do not make light of this disparity and need—it is at its heart authentic and needful de facto. I guess, it does not need to pay attention to its de jure characteristics to achieve legitimacy.

The day was Monday and I have chosen to visit the Jardin des Plantes. It was slightly cold and raining just a bit, but otherwise quite spectacular. Many wonderful sculptures and plants and trees and bushes to “beat the band” as my now departed father would have commented (that dear and dubious warrior who began his lawyerly career in Metaline Falls, Washington State, USA—population, well, much less than needed, certainly!). I remember thinking when I was very young that Jay R. (his moniker) was a rather cold and distant person—one who seemed more at home in his mind than in his skin; and then I met and began to comprehend his parents, who were more like Alaskan salmon than actual people. Later in my life I traveled to Wallace (Idaho State, USA, their initial place of power and respect and where my father grew up) and if I did not weep then, I certainly have wept since. In almost every interaction with that man, I could feel (in fact, was almost overwhelmed) by his virtual detachment—from me and my five siblings (and most everything that I could discern as “normal”) but most significantly, from himself and his wife—my mother, at least until I left the house for good, to at minimum represent my presence in the world, and at most (as was so, largely, during my nurturing years) to “hate” my presence in this world. My mother’s world, so terribly circumscribed, was at best meagre and harsh during her early and middle married years, and now, in retrospect, similarly for me, seeming just as forlorn and constricted. This seemed to be to me (and I am convinced most who knew her) a most terrible time for her—lost and confused, dazed by her marriage, which was never what she thought or perhaps hoped it would be, and then her children (one after the next) scraping the very life from her soul, as if she were “nothing” and everything known as a child and a young girl had turned out to be, either impossible, or a lie—a slap to the head that she could not fathom how to understand much less accept and integrate into her still developing psyche.

I think, and have come to believe, that this was the beginning of my own self-hatred—the genesis of my despicable and loathsome life, of which I am now approaching the end (or perhaps this is merely the beginning of my final resting posture). If the latter is the case, then I think I would like to rest for several millennia, or longer, *s’il vous plait*. One, I suppose, cannot spontaneously generate oneself into the world, so, parents (even Jesus, the gods bless him, had parents—people unwitting and perhaps even virginal, if one believes this mythology) are necessary and so deplorably omnipresent (even I am a parent, though I truly believe I have done no better; but then, I suppose, I am merely fulfilling my own destiny of being the



son of my father, and he, being the son of his). Though my children don't (or won't) speak to me now, I don't think it is because they hate me. It is more of a disdain, for that older man who thinks too much, and does, seemingly, just as he pleases (and what could be more degoutant than that—a king salmon swimming alone in frigid waters, posturing as a man or a father?).

There seems to be quite a general disregard for traffic signals by all Parisiennes on foot. They do not apologize for being *aux flagrante* in the crosswalk against the light (*Jamais!*) and the drivers be damned—whoever they may be and whatever they may be about (save for emergency vehicles, and one wonders why this sense of respect does not bleed over a bit—but it does not!). And, almost to a comical caricature, they like to walk in a straight line (the shortest discernible, apparently) to their chosen destination. This proclivity seems to manifest itself as a Parisienne prerogative, exercised as freely and as fully as possible—without, of course, actually shoving the noisome interlopers into the gutter (comical, yes, but there could be no *joie de vivre* in this extraneous exercise). They eat well, and share this passion openly and freely—but mostly amongst themselves. At least all of that so seemed to me—but I am admittedly, and at most times purposefully, in most social situations seeing from the outside in, so, my viewpoint must needs fall under suspicion. Remarkably, I spent this morning at the Pantheon, where many of the heroes of France are entombed—at least many of those who were known of and remembered. Again, it seems parenthetically at least the French have substituted their history (such as it is—chronologically it could hardly be considered unique!) for a kind of religion (*verite, egalite and fraternite*, etc.) though it seems the only means of actually being a part of their religion of country and culture is to have been born into it, and even that is no guarantee if you are not the proper shade of *peau*—trending mostly towards a shade of “white.” Even Italians are suspect, and the further south one goes the more suspicion attends to your presence (in France, that is). They seem to want to protect the sanctity of their national institutions by exclusion, rather than by the inherent vigor and strength of their truths, which to my mind does cast a certain shadow upon them all.

...

Ah, Paris... what can be said that has not already? Yesterday, strolling along the Rue Montmartre, I was reminded yet again of the *faux* sense of urgency and self-anointed significance that clings rather desperately to both old and new. If I may say, the new in a vibrant and welcoming city springs out at every opportunity, no matter what venue, like daffodils in a too early spring—nothing will (indeed, can) slow its exuberance and syntax. But today in Paris, while the new is here, especially in the young who know (much less remember!) few previous decades, but are somehow gasping (trembling even) under the stale and fetid air of history—remade and relived daily by the hulking and most somber life of centuries past, the young are ageing, inexplicably. This somewhat delusional past that while interesting and in some ways even significant (though this can be and is often debated ferociously!) is now, and for quite some time, dead and gone. Suffering under the constraints of a purposefully complex language, which initial goal was to separate and then to suppress the many from the few, and much of which is today ignored and avoided by most French citizens as being a bit too ridiculous even for themselves; from a culture that worships (it would seem upon inspection by an outsider) affectation and artifice—unhappily in this case all that is colored golden is now valued only as tainted memory; and from a political and social structure that keenly remembers and reveres its grand revolution but has quite forgotten the ways and the

wherefore, from all of this: the young are dying, inexpressibly, and sadly, now without cultural relevance or even reference.





## Disdain

There must be one moment held suspended  
In corpuscular manifestation, inexorable in its  
Waiting, just before a concatenation begins  
Forging a campaign to capture spirit and sense  
And transform it, in an instant that will be long  
Unforgiven, into a veritable cesspool of gloom

And despair. A look, a word, a gesture—all can  
Afford the luxury of infection and contagion  
Done, of course, at the molecular level, where  
Understanding is at its keenest, for there can  
Be no prevarication: here, amongst the born

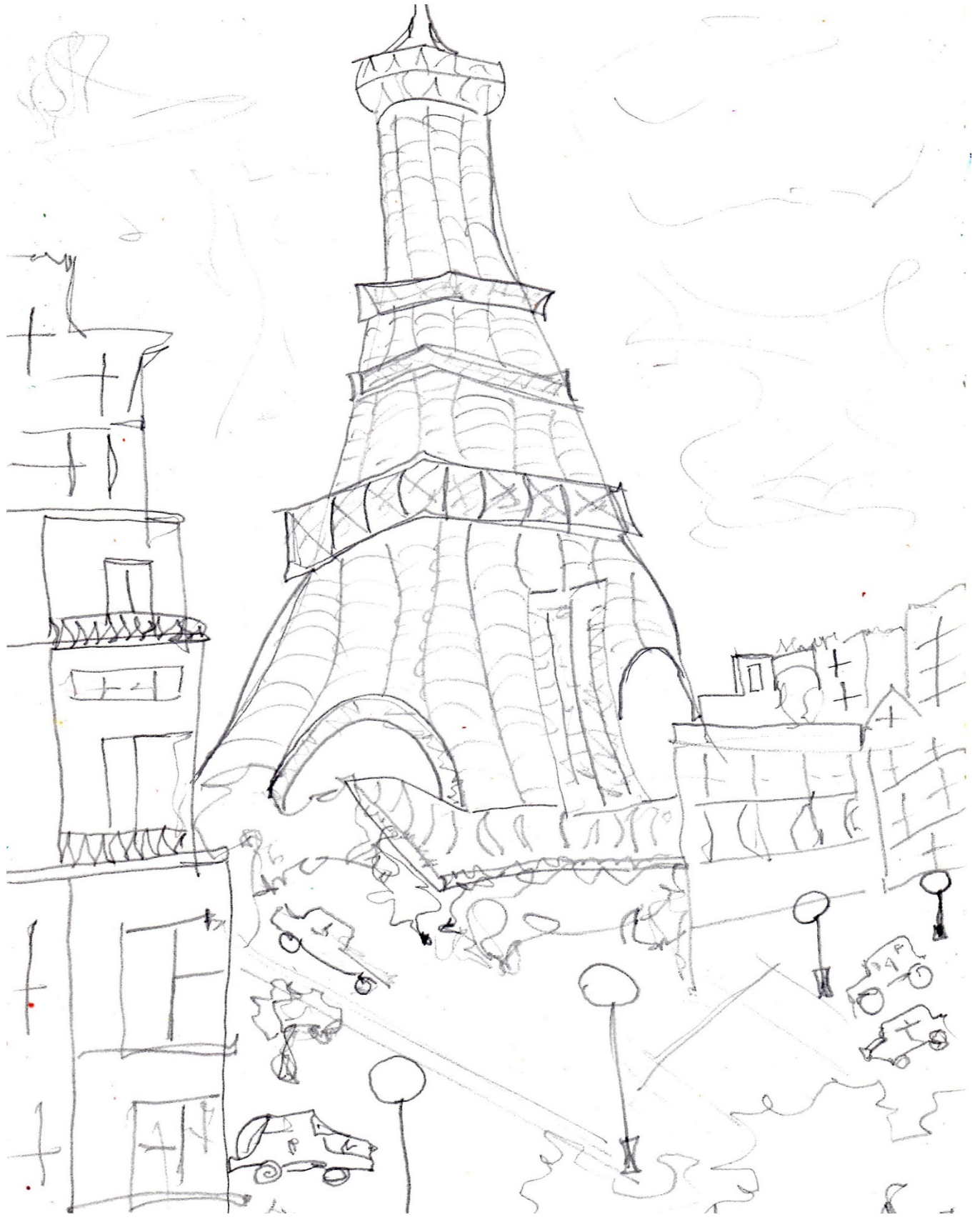
And dying. A too serious game of you first  
No, me first, done and re-done, until, well until  
Way past no matter. It is hard to say, of beings  
Who fear death in every case, but here it is, I think  
Where disdain resides, abiding. What if one turned

The other cheek, butt or jowl, as it may be; would it  
Ever matter? Possibly not, but shouldn't we hope and  
Take the chance that maybe it could, this uneasy refrain  
This abstention from disdain, perhaps it is an early  
Escape from pain, perhaps it could be a gain... perhaps?



I have often considered Paris as a woman, enchanting, sensuous, energized and enigmatically separate. Separate from others—other countries, other peoples; separate from the more common pathways of this shared euro-centric landscape, and that, because they like to forge their own, of course, and in their own manner; separate from reality, somewhat, as they are emotionally always in a bit of turmoil and intellectually a bit detached; and perhaps, un peu, separate from their own idea of themselves, how they were before, how they are now, and who, in the future, they aspire to be. But are we not all in that same boat with them, cast upon this mysterious and often angry sea of being, searching for an identity we can believe in, or at least pretend to do so, always hoping for the best, but never quite believing it is possible to achieve? Trapped within this personal and determined microcosm of us versus them, none of us like to think about why we did what we did, in the past or anytime; we do not like to think about why we would even think about such a thing as that. Certainly, the American brand is to act without thinking—how could we be wrong? We are so young and tender (without aspirations of evil, as we imagine ourselves to be free of such an obvious taint as that!), and our historians insist we have never been, wrong, that is. So why this ironical dismay and perturbation? Are we becoming French? Is that a part of our heritage we cannot quite renege upon? I can often feel captured in my own shortcomings, and when I do, I cannot quite remember from whence I came, and hardly perceive to where I travel; but in the end, and perhaps in consolation, I do emphatically realize that I am here, and not somewhere else. A small accomplishment, maybe, but still.





## Greed

To explain: it is an urgent necessity to do, to create  
To extenuate until one's genitalia becomes a veritable  
Flay for evil. One has chosen: a his or hers boner to bash  
And smash with, and then to cash out those bastard  
Bards of want and need, only so that greed can succeed

It is a price that any wise one is willing to pay  
Only so that one's erect, arrogant and selfish stiffy can  
Display a benevolence of self, staggering in its efficiency  
Brutish in its efficacy—drawn hotly against tomorrow's  
Disappearance: If all you want to do is to make

A lot of money, well, if it isn't that hard, keep  
Stroking, money is made especially for these  
Reasons: that is to eat as much of it as possible  
And then to shit it out, wherever and however  
And, most particularly, whenever—as this last is the

Sole and true test for the success of a burgeoning capitalist  
To evaluate one's own screeds, to testify until death do  
Us part. And what remains, we leave—such a  
Splendiferous stank, so that some such piles can always be  
Seen if not smelled throughout the world, even

Worshiped by those who cannot raise such a stank  
Such an epiphany of evil—or does it even matter?  
Once the stiches of time have been taken, there is  
No remainder larger than a thought or worse a regret

Thundering through the valleys of absence, always

Sensing that all that was here and all that remains  
Is nothing; and is there a beginning to nothing  
Or is it only an exclamation that you are done to  
Begin and finished to end, so why the consternation  
And the thrashing in between? There can be no

Reason, as reasons are the turds of history—the  
Veritable building blocks upon which the idiots  
Of time and circumstance build their monuments  
Of fabulous dysentery, shitting and shouting their  
Importance and then their demise, as if it were a

A thing upon which to curse and spit—which has  
Been done—to the misfortune of the children  
The smallest turds to be undone by the miracles  
Of demise—soon and absolutely demoralized by  
Their own descent into the immorality of pact

Deeds and thoughts which have all been left to the  
Bandits of hope—that curse of yesterday that  
Reclaims all who dare tread upon the road of  
Perfidy and puke—heroes to themselves perhaps  
But seen by history only as pitiful and stinking

Of the lucre of folly and happenstance. Why  
Would it matter to the cosmos if one cares  
Or if one farts his Sunday prayers to some  
Fixation or projection? Despair delayed, but



Only by a breath or so... methinks

## Nice

My stay in Paris this iteration was planned to be for just a few days. Prior to my departing Sea-Tac airport, but after learning of my exorbitant lease renewal option, was, I think, a period of one and one-half months, and it was a period of, well, strategic frenzy. But one thing I did which made very little sense at the time (but which I came to appreciate and enjoy immensely later) was to enroll online at a French language academy located in Nice, for four weeks attendance, scheduled to begin one month after my arrival in Amsterdam. I mention this because it is for this reason that I am leaving Paris for Nice tomorrow morning. The academy there is one I learned about during a previous visit and I had exchanged several emails with the administrator during the period of my frenzy. They did not offer a beginning course (most everyone in the EU speaks some French, it seems), but if I could test into their first level, they would accept me as a student. The reason this commitment made at least some sense to me at the time was that I had yet to devise a plan for my return. My plan was in fact to remain in Nice, probably, or environs for a year or two maybe. I read French fairly well and can speak well enough to obtain what I need, but understanding spoken French (usually the last aspect of success in learning a foreign language, according to one of my early tutors) needed considerable work.

I knew I would generate some debt, but I had a moderate income and all I needed was a niche, after all. What I was not to learn until two weeks later, and this from a fellow student who was American via Great Britain (there were just two of us who were American, but more about the school later), was that my passport, an American passport which for many, many years had in the EU served as a kind of open-ended visa, was now (enforced by a recent treaty) restricted to three months, and could not be extended except to return to your home country and re-apply. Well, this news took considerable romance out of the journey. For one thing, it was insulting (I just cannot say it any other way!), and secondly, there just did not seem to be any logical reason for this change, and I could not make sense of it except as a socially repressive tactic, which being from America I am quite used to, regrettably, but still, I found it offensive. I guess these are sour grapes, but there remained more of this sweet elixir of Nice to enjoy, and so I forced these disagreeable considerations out of my mind, at least for now!









## Shame

She is an evil sister—a mother who has  
Only sons for whom she has become an  
End with forgotten beginnings, but from  
Hell or someplace worse—europe perhaps  
(Before amerika was spawned from the

Bad seeds of centuries of self-loathing)  
She shines in her grisly and girlish exposure  
Not outdone in the least by the great  
Father whose prong she sheathed in lust  
And larceny: propagating a future with no

Reason to be and most certainly none to  
Continue—but continue she does, sowing  
In constant strife and discontent a tomorrow  
That is almost never worth visiting, unless of  
Course it is our day to die, for therein lies our

Only cause for celebration: each one's own  
And none withstanding the climax of destruction  
For in it alone do we find truly ourselves set  
Against, inexorably, each other and all that has  
Been or could ever be. Shame, a blush of

Understanding: what we have done thus far  
And all that we, as the only current excuse for  
Intelligence, could ever hope to create...  
And what have we made today to represent



Ourselves with glory and disdain? A turd...

The likes of which the world has never seen  
Nor have the begotten privilege of ever viewing  
Again. But it stinks! the intelligentsia complain  
The only answer to which is: but not as much  
As your arsehole, you bag of shit and stones

With guile but no sense of other, no responsibility  
For one's own stank—a heritage from which there  
Is no recovery, no revival, no escape. For what we have  
Accomplished, even shame cannot assuage, nor  
Expect to gauge its impact upon a world whose place

In the cosmos is tentative at best and most likely  
Despicably absent in the end. Maybe there is a  
Prayer, or could a shaman whose tricks are of the  
Dimension that only imagination might surround  
Who could relieve the spell and measure of these deeds?

Our children can feel the shame perhaps, but they  
Were given no tools to alleviate the stress in the  
Seam of our own evolution towards denial  
We all must fall down and disappear, that is the  
Story we have made—even the deepest and most

Abject shame could not change our direction  
So, we do not try... and therein lies the heart of  
Our demise. In this precarious and maybe  
Penultimate moment, before the end, but not

Yet there, not yet gone—but foregone, to be

Sure... is there a shift in the winds of fortune  
Or is that just a fart floating amongst the grinning  
Weeds of hope, yet forlorn in knowing tomorrow  
Is already gone? Do not even try to answer  
Questions that are only posed for a lost posterity

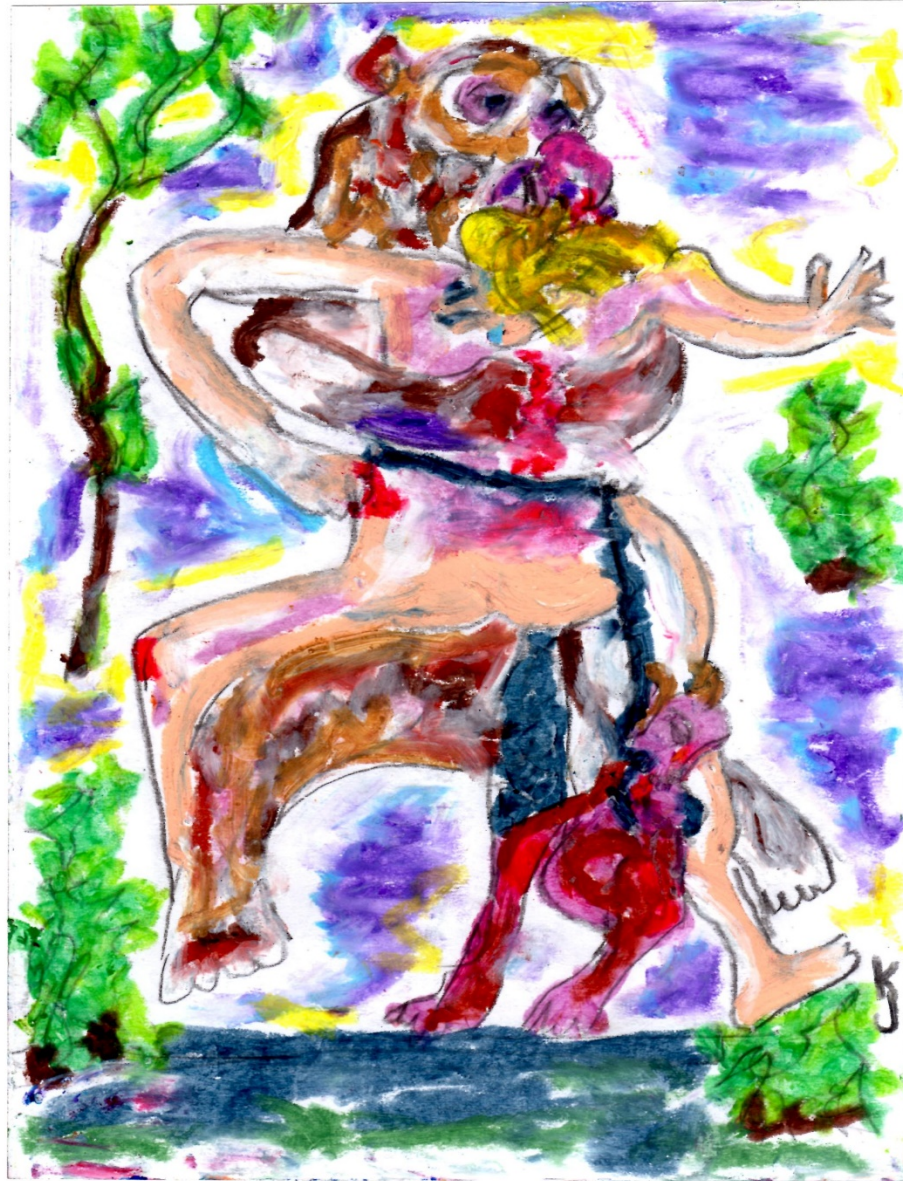
Perhaps it is a shame, but there are no answers  
And even if there were they could not be spoken  
As our place upon which to stand for speaking  
Is or will very soon be cleared, and words will no  
Longer be needed or useful—no sound but the faint

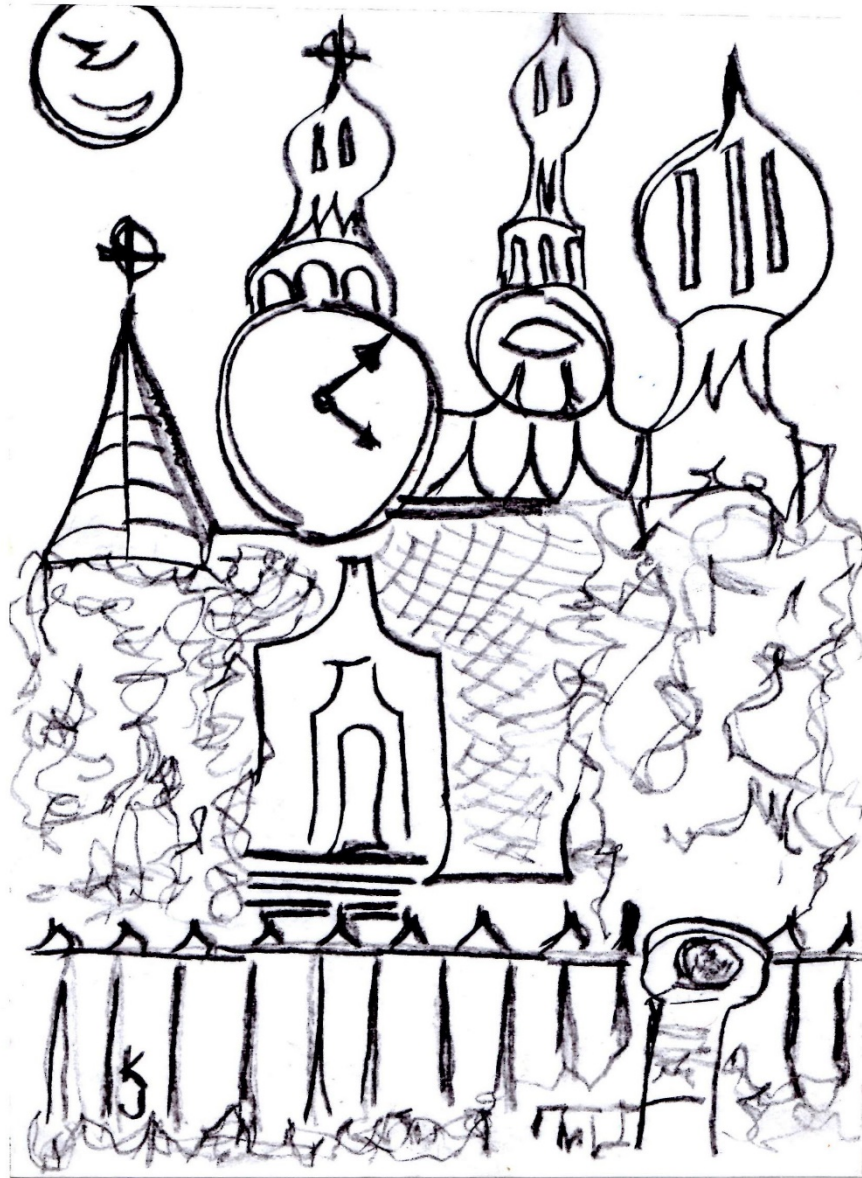
And wan drone of: I am sorry, I am sorry, I am sorry...  
Until even that slight noise will disappear in the cosmic  
Smoke--non-differentiated and without foundation  
For in that, and only that, does shame prosper...

The train trip from Paris to Nice is a spectacular ride, really the showcase train trip in France. One leaves Paris traveling at two hundred and ten kilometers per hour and arrives in Nice nonstop some seven hours later. It is a journey that rich people from the north have been making for hundreds of years, not as commodiously as this, of course. Taking the bathes in southern France on the Mediterranean during the winter months was a commonplace activity for the upper classes throughout northern Europe. In modern times, with the Kingdom of Monaco located a bit to the east and Cannes a bit and some to the west, I have heard from many locals how they interpret the geographical flow of money and those who have it (in various contexts and details but trending toward the same conclusion): money works in Monaco and it plays in Cannes, but when it needs rest and solace it comes to Nice. The class structure in Europe has been held in place by the hoarding of resources for the few, while the many support this process through complacency and a truly false sense of middle-class values and opportunities—same as everywhere, I suppose; and because, it seems to me at least, they have never known anything else (well, except for abject slavery and starvation, that certainly has been known in stark and desperate juxtaposition throughout!). They have come to understand this flow, its high and low tides, as if it were organic to the very foundations of their own being and organization. Of course, the social mythologies of religion, politics and finance have a stronger pull upon the working minds and beating hearts of our species than the earth's moon does upon its own waters.

It is my second evening in Nice and the weather is summer-like, in fact my first purchase (well, nearly my first!) was a Barcelona hat, which I stumbled upon while making a detour into the Italian district (or more explicitly the eastern sector of the old city center), as the sun had been like Thor's hammer it seemed, upon my previous evening's celebration on arrival. Alcohol is such a friend to my rather imperious self-negation—it sometimes surprises me that I am not more of a drunk than...well, don't let me explain.

And now, the second day of my language class has passed and ma confiance (and probably theirs as well, n'est pas?) is still up in the air, high as a launched weather balloon. Can it fly, will it fly...?







## Time

Time is a patent member of a clique of  
Demons which conspire to shred the reality  
Of illusion. We are only a mirror of ourselves  
From which we emerge, both palliative and  
Pernicious, gifts given as equal treasure—the one  
Paid in dross while the other in gold, but which by  
Which is, unhappily, never foretold: just a dollop or  
Two of devilry stew? But then, in a bit, without doubt

Or concern, we are reclaimed, leaving only ashes and  
Mist to resolve our issues; or tears, or is that just some  
More of the same game? We proceed as if this  
Life were a circus, with ourselves posing as the  
Ringmaster, but all joking aside, this rector, this  
Mentor of our near accidental and misperceived

Spawning is nothing more than a misbegotten  
Collection of Fools and Kings serving as the devil  
Himself (or herself?). Death, our only real friend  
Comes disguised as a womb, or a memory of one  
Go ahead, make me laugh again—it is a useless and  
Forlorn rictus, a wrinkle or at best a slip in time

Available to all who have already lost their own  
Minds--how sublime, this crazy ride, thrusting against  
Every possibility, knowing that time is only just for now  
And then, after a very short while, that is all

Nice supplies the workers and infrastructure support for both Cannes and Monaco, busing workers to and from each day as defined by individual labors, as it is much too expensive for them to live in either place. This makes Nice a working city for the most part, save for the grand hotels which stand cheek to jowl along the brilliant Mediterranean coastline. Prior to my departure from America, I had negotiated a five week stay at a hotel where I had stayed before. It was a smaller hotel, set back from the sea, but sitting halfway up a short hill so the sea could still be viewed from most of the rooms via a short porch balcony, which was perfectly grand, and somehow quite private except for the seagulls that were constantly soaring, diving and looping throughout a huge and luminous sky.

I think my negotiation with the hotel was effective, I got their monthly rate, the manager told me through email, and a nonpeak and repeating customer discount (this being my third visit to this very hotel). Do not mistake, it was still expensive, but now my previous life was in storage and my moderate income could be redirected, and my savings, I thought, could staunch any overflow. And, most happily, my school was located in a small and tidy neighborhood about four blocks away, an easy and pleasant walk. You will note, even a plan generated during a strategic frenzy is much better than no plan at all! Being an older person, it seems to have become, almost without realization, more and more challenging to achieve excitement in my life. And I vehemently deny that I am jaded. I take pleasure simply and straightforward. I find motivation in complexity, certainly, but my joy is anchored in simplicity. And I am very excited about going to school again!

This school is a three levels French-intensive academy. One must “test” into it (this is a very French!) and then re-test, as I discovered on the first day, to determine at which level one should begin. Before the first day I had no idea whom my fellow students would be, and those turned out to be the most fulfilling and fascinating aspects of the whole experience. They were college-age students for the most part, though in graduate or advanced undergraduate programs, a scattering of professional business people or government administrators, and several young people who had immigrated and needed to speak French better. We did not share countries of origin (China, Germany, Switzerland, Japan, Netherlands, Russia, and I am sure there were others in the first and third levels, as these are just the ones I knew about in my own second level), along with so many other cultural identifications we did not share; but what we did share and hold in common trust was our interest in and commitment to improving our French language skills.

French schooling is well known for its rigor and this academy was no exception. The pertinent rule in the school was that in the classroom only French was spoken (which made very good sense given the number of languages that could have been spoken!); this, and the fact that we were seated along both sides and the back of a long, fairly wide wooden table in quite close proximity, had the effect of forcing us into a kind of desperately interdependent friendship. Theoretically at least, we all spoke French at the same level, but in practical application, as in all reality I aver, our individual skills and weaknesses were as variable and unlike one to the other as we were ourselves. The beauty, in fact the true magic of this elixir, was the teacher. There were several teachers in the school, an administrator (with whom I had emailed), and the headmaster, but I only experienced the one, for four hours each weekday morning, for four weeks.





## Waiting

Again, it seems, it is a time for waiting  
Upon death, not unlike a poisoned prince  
Who is watching his future disappear  
With the last of his eyes, while his legates  
Chortle their grief upon biscuits and cream

Their unlikely innocence perforated by  
Longstanding glimpses of grandeur and  
Treasure. But what of the sky and the sun  
Will they weep in my absence? Will nothing  
Be as it was, is it just for me to see, all alone

And now, upon my departure, beware only  
Of the poof! Or else, perhaps, you can send  
Along some proof of your remainders  
Like a lunch taken along to school, or more  
Like a casket closed upon the pain and

Disdain and opened only for the smoke and dust  
Of bones? Though I cannot guarantee a happy  
Departure, I can happily assure to you that  
We will not, nay, cannot touch our skins and  
Join our thoughts together, as if it were a valid

Pretense of former love and life, nevermore...  
In the end, who will be left to care about these  
Petty details that seemed like such boulders in the  
Brain and logs in the eye of life before the end



And, finally, what have we done? What are

We made of, except this shit and these stones

Waiting...

Teaching is something we have been doing as a species, well, since the time we arrived, as a species. Teachers' blood runs through my family line, so I feel that I can say this: there are those who do teach, those who try to teach but do not succeed, and those who teach but do not try; well, this teacher, my teacher for these four weeks of intensified, somehow magnified and throughout unique and quite delightful weekday mornings, within the walls of this small academy in Nice, taught, as if she were a Zen master of teaching, creating an ambiance of nearly complete control, in order to nurture an exotic flower of acceptance, experiment, expansion of capability, and yes, excitement. I suppose if French were an easy language to learn, she could be out of a job in some future time, but given my own experience in this regard, I do believe her teaching job is secure, and I also believe she is an exquisite practitioner of the art.

Because my mornings were taken up (and early afternoons too, homework, you know!), the full ksj protocol was consigned to the weekends, but the later afternoon and evening portion was still in play. I discovered a bar that served absinthe (the way it must be served, per the barkeep—one of Baudelaire's favorite drinks, as I recall) which became a favorite place of mine to write. A walk from this bar, which sits within six blocks of the sea, through the heart of the Italian sector of the city which lies to the northeast, is a walk seemingly backward through the ages. If during this walk, I let my mind travel, guided by the history of cultures being radiated by these narrow streets, this architecture, these citizens, then I am confronted by the Holy Roman Empire, the Caesars, the Popes, and the wars of course, never ending really, and then finally as I arrive at my favorite Italian bar, where a corner table, sitting just off the avenue, is always available at this chosen hour, I am ready to write my poems.





## Return

A return to absence can be a restful  
Journey, if a fool can be found to drive  
The bus over the cliff—and why do not  
We all know where to look for one such  
As could be found in the mirror, perhaps

Or if one could search the eyes of  
History where reside all our brothers  
And sisters involved in this chicanery  
We (with a wink and a nod) call life, or  
Is it death that calls life hence, from its

Hiding place, under the shit and stones  
Of opportunity. Why? Why do we care  
About tomorrow when yesterday (in  
Perpetuity) calls us back to before our  
Beginning... as if that could serve as

Credential or passport from hell to  
Bliss—a trip one can be certain is not  
Scheduled, or if it is, there is no bus  
Nor stop—all is gone save for the  
Scaffold where the neck of truth is

Stretched until the head is so far from  
The feet any journey would take a  
Thousand years to complete—that is  
If one could secure a ticket (which can



Never be a guarantee of a seat) more

Like a place upon the boat crossing  
The Styx—a trip that has no reason for  
Return, no reason in fact to exist  
Except that it has always been and will  
Always be. It seems some journeys one

Sets out upon, while others set out upon  
Us. Life is such a journey—leaving from  
Nowhere and somehow returning to  
The same place. No suspicion of a fraud  
No request for a return of funds, or

Perhaps an interest paid upon the tears  
And the fears and the fracture which is  
Understanding. Wild hair and wild surf  
There is no place that can heal my lack  
Nor would I consider that to be a blessing

Or even a curse, whichever would be  
More demeaning, it is a pick for the devil  
To stack, and then to burn down to hell  
Which is the only place for fiends like us  
We seek, we destroy, we celebrate our

Victory over life—there seems no good  
Reason not to do so, being ridiculous is  
Our strength, for which we are in training  
So be it: it is not a joke—I am not

Smiling, or can you even tell with

Your dead eyes, or are we seeing

Backwards? Who even cares for

These questions? Who, indeed

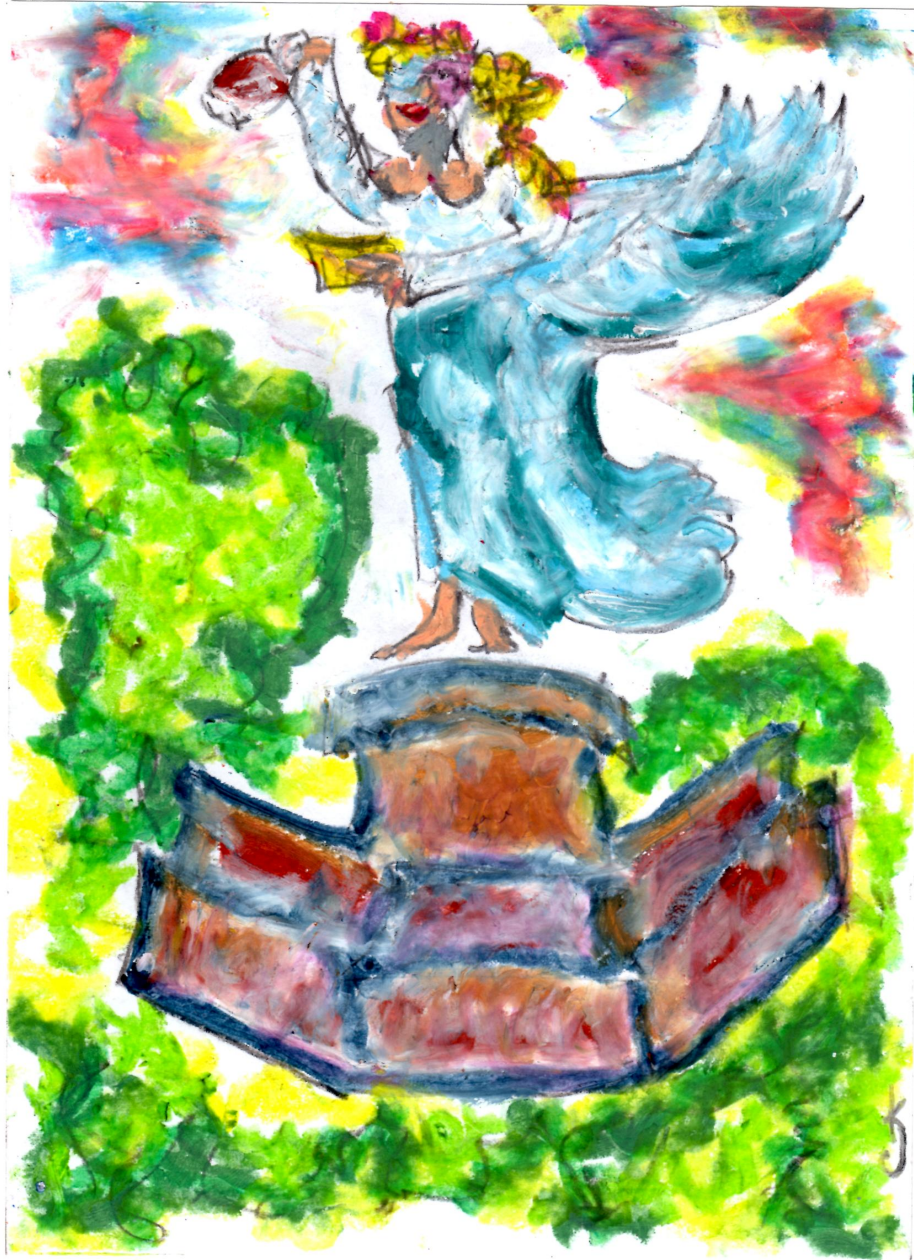
Really cares... at all?

I grew up in a small town, fewer than fifteen hundred souls called it home alongside of me, or called it, as in my case, some other less savory and less comforting appellations, like repressive, small-minded and for the most part unforgiving. In retrospect, I can only feel relief and emancipation, but never regret (for leaving, I mean). It is hard for me to fathom how the personality of most small towns has been so flagrantly misunderstood. Yes, there is often a scenic beauty hovering over and around these isolated, fatigued and mostly ignored bastions of American democracy. This debatable scenic beauty most often becomes the confused reason for being, for these mostly forgotten places, even emblematic of why these various spiteful and self-serving collections of citizens, who have chosen these out-of-the-way and eccentric places of doom, even exist. When in truth, the one signal characteristic that is held tight, in near despotic commonality, and that is, most essentially, absence. The absence of others, and all that others bring along with them: needs and requirements, cooperative necessities and integrated realities, all of which, simply put, unfit for a redneck's cup of tea. For the minds of many Americans (fortunately, not as yet, most), more people to live with or around, simply means more problems to deal with, or to conceal and ignore, which is usually their preference.

These small-town people are ill at ease with themselves, their own families, and certainly with each other. They are ill-equipped to utilize even rudimentary socializing skills: basic interactions, communication, negotiation and adjustment; so, given this serious level of inadequacy, all that is left is to protect yourself from others, to the best of your meagre and ever-lessening capabilities. And this protection, well, it can assume the face and posture and disposition of a perverse and sordid beast. A credential for being here amongst these few is not so much earned, as given or taken away, by one or some of an even lesser number who have managed, somehow, to control the middle, from which the generally very scant resources are allocated, delegated, or relegated. And this self-chosen one or some, well, they are not the best of us, but rather, the best of the few who have chosen to avoid the others. So, to my mind, these are merely the best of our worst.





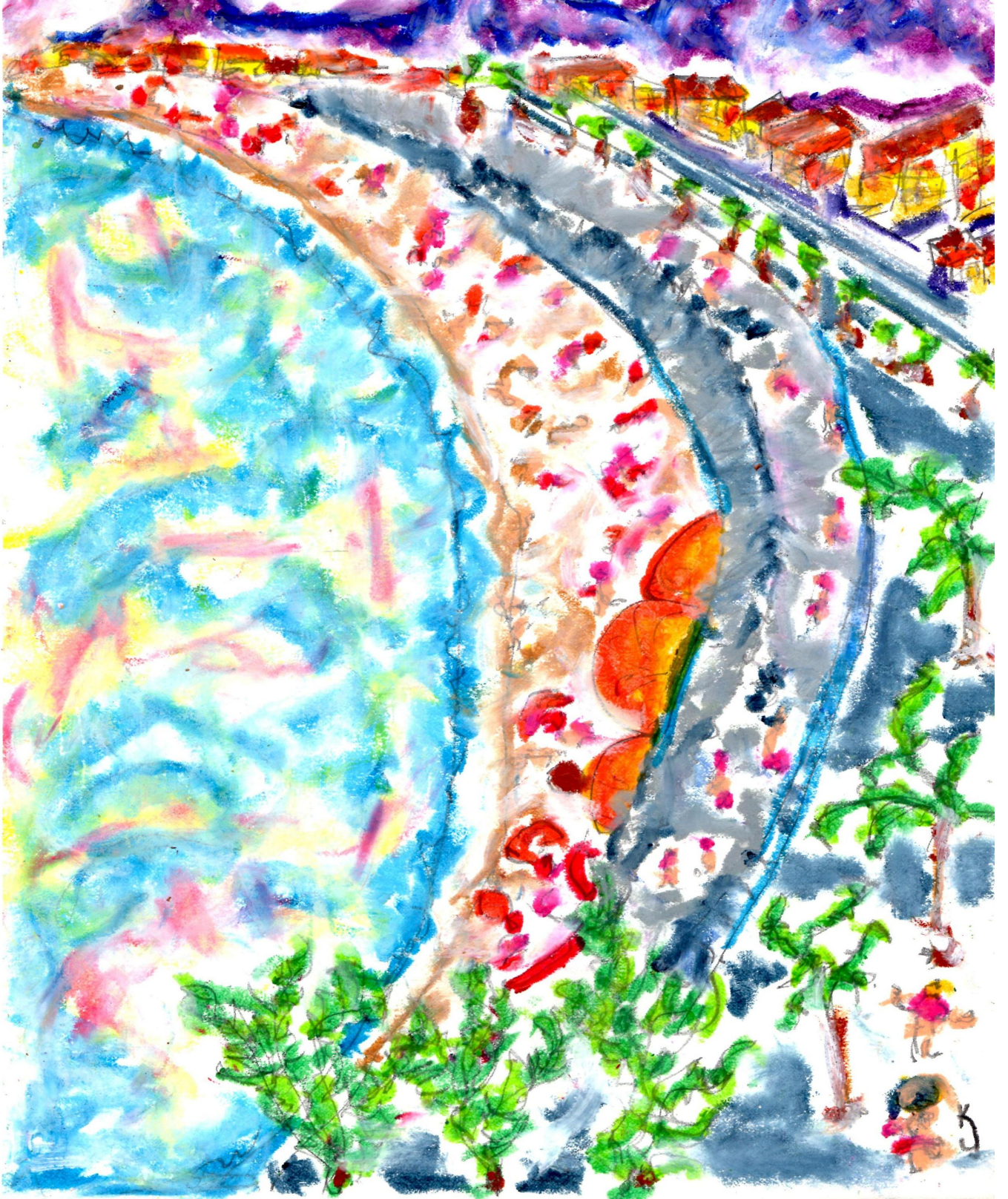




Awareness of self is nearly completely absent; and if one were to extrapolate to one's culture and then on to one's political state that absence is all but glaring—obscenely so when viewed as an international nemesis working against organization (even against a collective consciousness of place!) much less cooperation. Our leaders are small-minded and weak, reflective of our own stylized ineptitude and desuetude. We seem to substitute a rather audacious know-it-all-ism to be utilized in every instance instead of a rationalist approach to the ever-present demands of our world which in essence would require a re-discovery almost at every moment in order to be understood. Even at a minimalist perspective our international bankers have taken great advantage of capitalizing on our newly capable electronically aware economy—now directing monetary arbitrage, capital displacement, along with such things as capital investment or disinvestment schemes, like selling short and de-capitalizing companies and corporations with the sole and rather frenzied intention of maximizing profits. Our once trusted bankers entrusted with our highly prized cultural resources have now for the most part become virtual pirates—their god profits, their morality greed, while luxury, in all of its most extreme and profane expression, has become their armor and self-definition. Now, the question becomes is there an antidote to this extreme amoralism?

Or are we already too late in our realization and too late in our attempts to ameliorate this outcome? Firstly, I think, we must agree that our electronic facility has outstripped our abilities to control our delusions. Secondly, I think, and this is probably the most crucial axiom: we must recognize the viability as well as the responsibility of each of us—one for the other. We are a species in crisis, which can gain nothing in our struggles, so long as we direct these struggles against ourselves. We, as humans, are the perceived problem, but when viewed rationally, within our historical context, is this artifact really not merely the remainder of our process of life here on earth—a leftover from the period when we indeed lacked the tools and the resources for solutions? But that is not the case today (at least, I do not believe that it is!).

We could be moving towards an actual new dawn—when people matter most, not historical process, not worn-out and disconnected ideas concerning cultural, geographic, or the most pernicious of all racist preconceptions. We could be on the verge of a global reckoning—even a reemergence into the cosmos as a species to be recognized as evolved and advanced. Or, do we continue with our nonsensical wars, bigotry and cultural discriminations? Is this not a decision for each of us to take? A decision and then a commitment to uphold ourselves and each other within a context of mutual recognition and support?





## Fear

Yes, that is what this feeling is... this that gnaws like a rat on concrete, how can we be immune? Not to rat's teeth, like that steel-edged brush—the one we use to clean the teeth of Satan—that nearly mythological treatise that works inside each of us—shredding reason (only a fool's game played by those left desperately intelligent, or so they think just before the noose tightens). There might be a replacement for fear—if shitting through the heart were possible, for instance, or stepping into one's own void—only an excremental signification. But for that bastard brother, hate; and that bitch sister, envy, it would only be a question of who could destroy whom first. But through the complications of this despicable scenario we have discontent, privilege which breeds it, and finally, when nothing can be done to dissuade these begetters of malevolence, war, that great equalizer of good and evil—planting and then harvesting the seed of each into the heart of the other, until white becomes black and black is turned to red; until death becomes the *raison d'être*, and life and its now feeble and weary perquisites are lost to chaos, recrimination and then and now quite passionate denials. Is it this then what we fear? Alas, no, but rather, are we fit exact enough to the prevalent standard of fashion? Are we happy enough to escape the ridicule of those who pledge their love, by always utilizing the fiendish knives of helpful criticisms mild, oh so mild, disapproval—those damned smirks, with their poisonous fangs just hidden by a gently smiling demeanor—if only there were a platform from which we could dive, with spectacular elan of course, into this steaming pile of festering shit! Doing in the first place what will in all hope and circumstance be accomplished in the end, by default—as this system tilts only in the direction of failure; or is death considered a success in this Satan's kitchen of possibilities? I would not like to account for these histrionics, pestering and puerile—for even these are, or must be, perfidious beyond measure of number—is it the ten toes of evil which we must fear or is it the ten thousand fingers? If fear were dust we could not breathe, if it were bone, we could not stand, but if it is our mother, our father, our heritage, indeed, our legacy, well then, we cannot be, we cannot know, we cannot act, we cannot reconcile ourselves to this difficulty of truth, this difficulty of pursuit: to live. I am almost too afraid to laugh or even to smile at this most immodest proposal—to live without fear—when each and every molecule of same is nothing more or less than that, when laughing is crying and crying is, well, left only for children, those who are still yet a vestige of stank and rigor and shit, as if that could produce an angel or a demon—the same in fact, the difference only a fiction or a lie, or a life like our own, perhaps...



As small-town Americans, we have somehow got it into our minds that we can do and continue to do whatever, whenever, wherever, however and to whomsoever we want. And each of these ridiculously small towns, along with those slightly pitiful and barely populated states which embody their mechanism and support them, with their elected (I guess, this word must still apply, though for a lack of voter diversity and repression, it begs for another more accurate descriptor) representatives, strive with treacherous dedication to protect and fortify this American grotesquerie, *c'est dommage, n'est pas?* It was conceived to be a controlling mechanism by our slave-owning, white and male, founding fathers, I must assume, these united states of ours. One representative and democratic arm, our House; one aristocratic and repressive arm, our Senate; one autocratic and putatively remedial arm, our courts; and finally, one despot, the only one who can spoon the porridge, I guess, our President. And, of course, all of this mess being replicated for each state, as they emerged from their own shadows of skullduggery and corruption. A little bit of everything taken from and added to the stew (and stank!) of our European heritage.

The only lesson to be learned, from this over two hundred years of operational America, is that the more people and diversity of people involved in the planning and execution of whatever societal process the better! There is no perfect governmental system, and there are certainly no perfect leaders, so it seems it is from this point of imperfection that we must begin again, hopefully, as what we have accomplished thus far is truly diabolically insufficient. Perhaps we have failed simply because, well, we are from the start imperfect? Yes, this is most probably true, but when in our beginning, we impulsively drew imaginary lines and called this a country, and more and more arbitrarily drawn lines states, and empowered those few who were best advantaged (old, white, European-descended men, let us be truthful in our reckoning!) to make and enforce their own rules and laws of these so-called states, allowing them, and then their families and direct descendants, to engender value, strictly allocate scarce resources and finally to reap and hoard the resultant riches; then, my friends, we have achieved what today we refer to as simply the United States of America.

These imaginary lines can be blurred by war, of course, civil or otherwise; but the resultant reaping and hoarding of this "democratic" process never stops, or slows, or sleeps—it remains a juggernaut of its own immoral consequences, in perpetuity. And that is such a happy circumstance for those few that they will do virtually anything to perpetuate this disgrace of humanity. In fact, our USofA spends one billion (that is one thousand million, just to enhance our understanding of this amazing phenomenon!) dollars each and every day of the year, with the express intention of "defending" these prerogatives. Not even to ask the question of whether or not these dark and rather delirious prerogatives are worth the cost of this defense, but instead, who, what, when, where and how will this defense reveal itself? To ourselves? And to those others, those many members of that other, much more expanded, but even more exclusive club (if you will!), our species? And finally, to the many who are not numbered in those privileged few, and who are thereby without these prerogatives? Well, if history can serve as a reference for this infernal declension, these throes of chicanery, then their portfolio must be viewed as very grim, indeed.





## **Adversity**

It seems it might be the perpetual myth  
Of us against them: a joke that was an  
Anchor upon hope to keep her mortal  
For she had flown too close to the truth  
A word that eviscerates all other words

Leaving a skeleton of despair. Maybe, we  
Could invent a word—like we did a bomb  
To blow apart this myth that still haunts  
Our dreams and could serve as the shit-  
Sauce to season our descent. Of course

Oblivion will welcome us—it does not  
Matter which way our face is turned  
To the left, to the right, or to the light of  
Indifference and pity. There is a rhythm  
And sense to this sadness, understood

But not absorbed by its history. We go  
Away and then are re-absorbed by our  
Destiny—senseless and cruel; but such  
A happy absurdity that one can be  
Snatched away just by the moment

When away has almost certainly  
Become here, again...









## Duty

To whom, one might ask? That beast who thrust  
His hardened prong into that unholy hole of  
Transition, from this to that, or really, does that  
State the story too mildly? It seems a more fascistic  
Domination of small to large, well, until positions

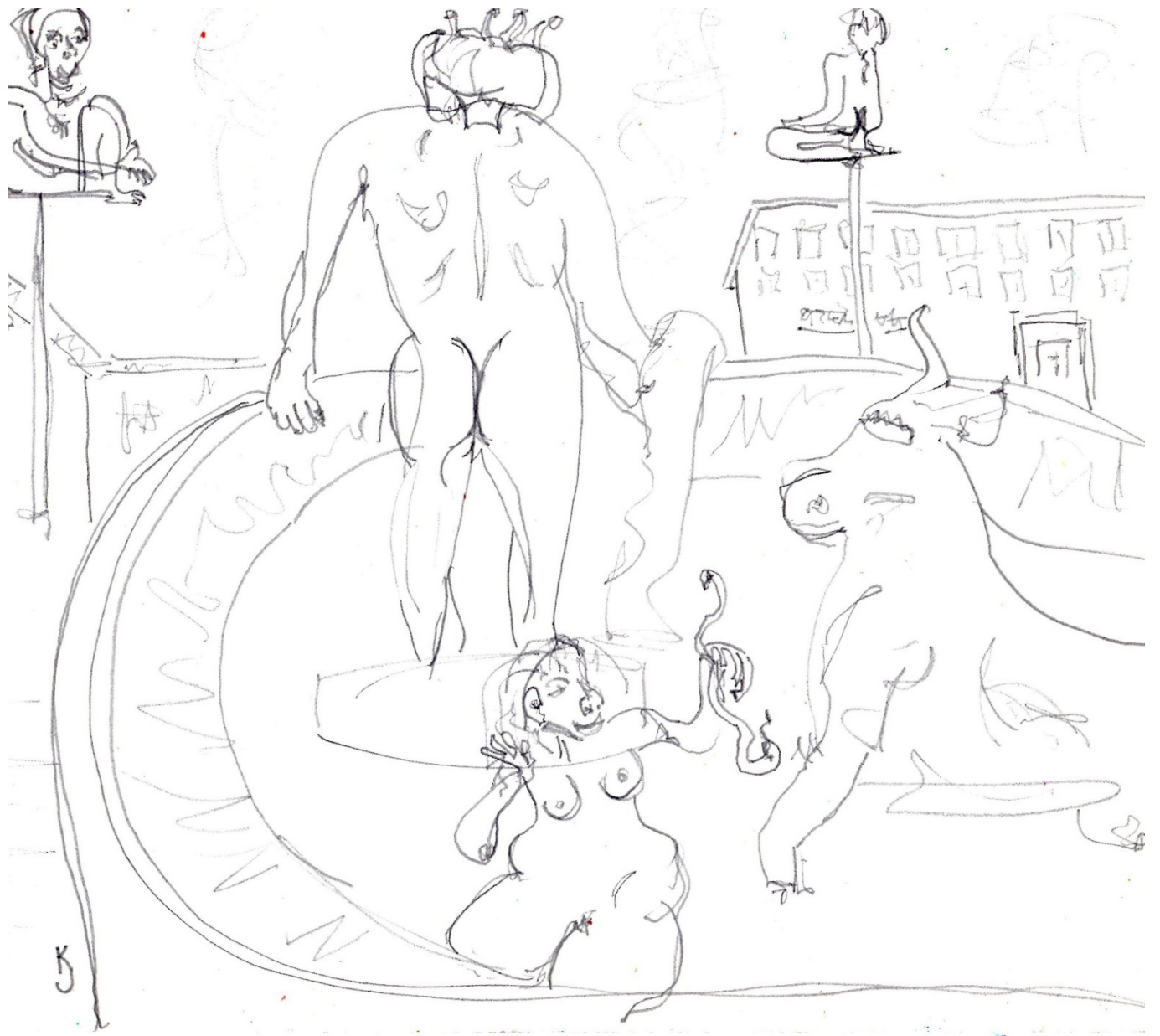
Are reversed when small, now large, crushes large  
Now feeble and dithering—and of course our  
Mutual piling of dung has advanced one notch  
Towards its final and ultimate uselessness—but  
Is there not a pit in hell which has consigned a

Place for this impertinence of life (not even to  
Talk of love—that forlorn remainder of hope,  
A task better left to the carrion birds of family)  
There could be a kind of balance in this—hovering  
Over the pit of shits-past—but imbalance is more

Assured—especially should one take this sense  
Of duty to heart and soul, words really without  
Substance, but entire civilizations have been  
Built upon them—and will continue to be, or  
Not? After all, who can decide these things

If not we...





## Marseilles

At the end of my stay in Nice, I still had twelve days or so left on my three-month allocation, which I planned to divide among Marseilles, Paris and then back to Amsterdam, to gorge on the Van Gough Museum, which because it was relatively newly opened I had not yet viewed, and then finally my flight back to America.

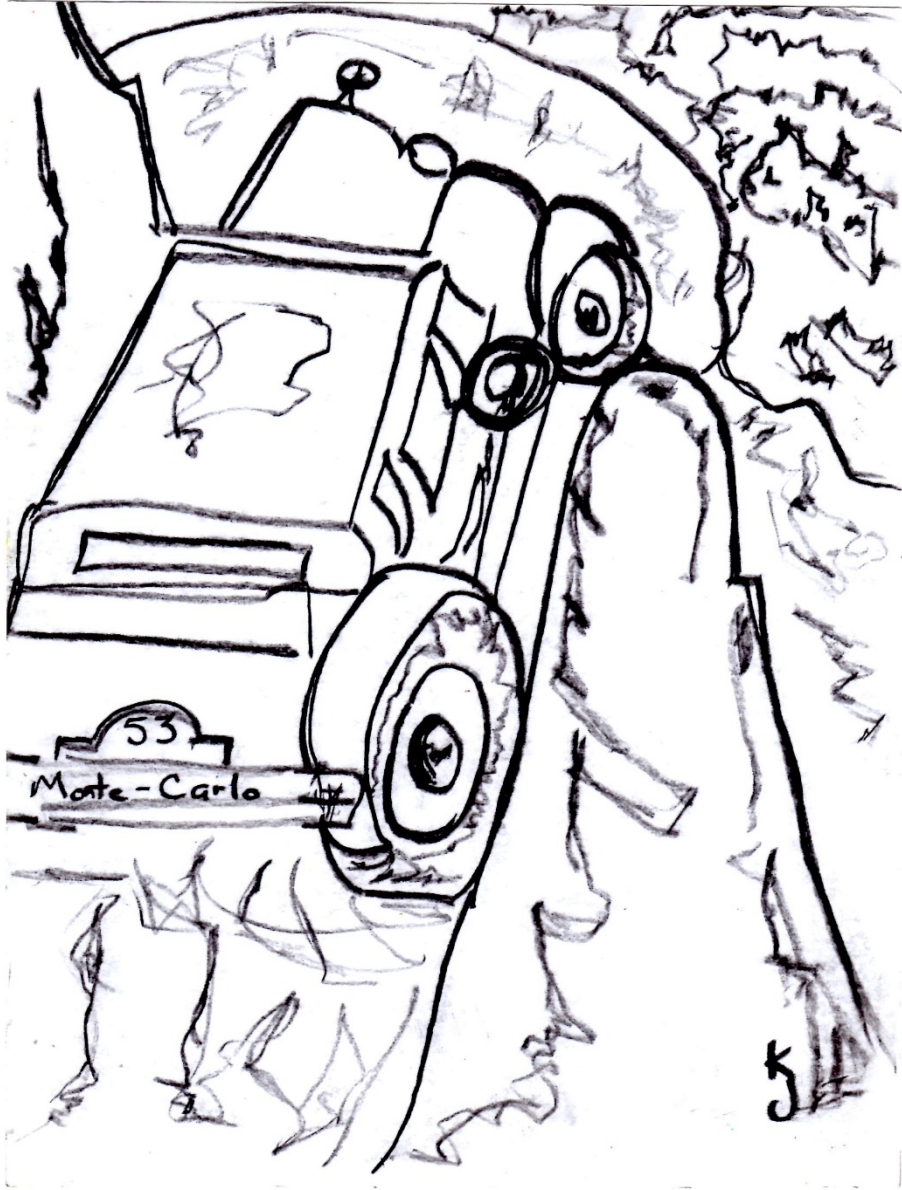
The train from Nice to Marseilles is not their showcase line though it does provide perfectly adequate service for this region of the northwestern Mediterranean coast. We seemed to make stops at every opportunity, but as the journey progressed the distractions faded to white noise as my mind struggled to engage my problem: to somehow plan for a journey to return home. After hearing the news about my passport restriction, I had checked its validity with my best contacts, two bartenders and my hotel manager (a delightful woman and quite resourceful, too!), and it was of course confirmed. They had all heard reports of such and the same; but I refused to be disheartened at that moment, and so had decided to postpone planning for a journey home until after my arrival in Marseilles some weeks later. And now, I was steeling myself for these efforts.

...

My days in Marseilles I spent mostly working out blues and jazz chords on my flute, reading (which I dearly love to do, but except for *les exercices francais*, something I had done very little of lately!), several times strolling down the long hill avenue from the train station to the waterfront, seeing and tasting North African cultures at every step, remembering and thinking about French colonization and about how words themselves are metaphors, making understanding each other a social construct, at best, and an outright delusion at worst; and in the afternoons, when the Mediterranean sun is calming and the air from the sea is clean and fresh, I would find my way down the back side of this same hill, behind the train and bus stations, to a little neighborhood bar that served pretty fine cognac, and where the locals could watch and bet on dog races shown on the television. It was a friendly place, and I felt quite at home there, writing a little, reading and drinking.

So clearly, words are difficult to rely upon when one is seeking understanding, but when considered properly it must be a given that we understand each other at least as well as we understand ourselves: again, we are of the same species, laboring basically with the same tools. So, communication must somehow go beyond words, or before, more likely. I remember one time walking back up that same hill, towards the train station on a sunny afternoon in Marseilles, randomly picking a small bar that in total size was not much bigger than two hallways, running parallel for a bit, and then mushrooming into a small lounge at the end, with a few tables and a very small stage. It was a North African bar for certain, which I had recognized upon entering by the frequenters of the few small tables scattered about in front, who were drinking tiny cups of dark coffee, and talking very fast, perhaps in French; but whether Algerian, Tunisian, or some other, I did not know. The proprietor bid me welcome and I presume asked what I wanted in a language I am pretty sure I had never heard before. I raised my fist and extended a thumb to my lips, he smiled, I pointed to the tap and there was a cool beer sitting in front of me on the bar as quick as that.

Or, for a more complicated example, going up this same hill on a different street, I found myself in a second floor shop (that is, one has to climb steps up and over the first floor, as it is taken up by half daylight apartments, though I remember it being entirely unclear whether any of these were actually occupied, as this was a few years ago, and Marseilles was suffering from rather severe financial straits, and there were many vacancies). Anyway, the interior of the shop was dimly lit, sparsely laid out with some few items in stock, and it was Asian, I remember thinking Chinese, but again. I was immediately attracted to a clothes rack sitting toward the back, somehow in its own light, on which hung an array of truly gorgeous robes. The various colors displayed were quite splendid indeed: royal purple, emerald green, deep ruby red, and all of them sharing and intermixing in an aura of near luminescence, as I remember it seemed to me at the time. Please believe me when I say I would have been quite happy with any one of them. They were made of thick silk, with fantastically embroidered dragons, both inside and out. I am sure I must have stood there agape for a minute or two before I realized the shopkeeper was standing at my right elbow. We had not exchanged a word, an assumption, apparently, we had both made that whatever words we held within our respective lexicons would likely not be in common nor help that much! I raised my hands to indicate my shoulder width and waist and put the question in my eyes. He smiled a tiny smile and gestured with his hand for me to follow, stopping in front of a group of robes near one end of the rack, which he indicated by brushing them slightly with the back of his hand. I picked one that was red, trimmed in black with a black dragon on the back, while on the inside the same but reversed. I held up a sleeve of the one I had chosen to show him, as if in supplication. He held up one finger indicating for me to wait. He disappeared into the back and after a few moments reappeared followed by an even more elderly Asian man, seeming very circumspect indeed. My initial contact reached over and held up the same sleeve I had indicated to him as my choice. This elderly and circumspect Asian man looked at me as if he were reading my tea leaves, very politely, for a minute or two, I think. And I looked back at him in anticipation and interest, without much else on my mind, at all. This mode of shopping was not common to the west, nor to my experience. Finally, he gave a very brief but definite nod of his head, turned and disappeared again into the back. My contact carefully removed my choice from its padded hanger and again motioned for me to follow. We arrived at the front of the shop, where there was a small desk. He sat down and wrote a number on a slip of paper and handed it to me. I truly do not remember what that number was, but it was not exorbitant, and I do remember being surprised at how little it was. In fact, I did pay in cash with euros, so it could not have been in excess of one hundred, or so. After he completed his very careful wrapping of my new robe, he passed the parcel to me as if it were an object of great value, which to me it certainly was! I smiled hugely, and said, "Merci beaucoup!" Until I was back outside on the avenue, I did not consider the fact that those two words were the only words exchanged between us throughout my visit, and looking back, I really think my smile had served much better than these.





## History

Yes, this surrogate dressed in memory, or that which  
Passes for yesterday, as shadow, beyond retrospection  
It seems, all but collapsed as if it fell upon the head-end  
Of a giant turd which texture and context signals only contempt  
Standing rigid in our pompous disregard for failed circumstance

This pretext and smell perfumes hotly even our most  
Assiduous attempts to not know our past, to not be outstripped  
By simple misunderstanding, we have now designated experts  
Always recognized by the stark and sordid tailings along after  
Their steps into desolation and acid rain; or even better

By their eternally (for us, it seems, to our sorry wisdom!) desiccated  
And despoiled explanations, about which, not even  
They themselves can agree: so, they, and then we  
In our ever-failing efforts to try to keep our heads  
Above this cesspool of their vapid contemplations

Must learn to accept, as a parrot learns to shit its crackers  
And then often to vomit back upon their own constipated  
And shy reflections. This can only serve as a pastime for  
Idiots and fools—if only I were not such a one...  
Yes, history has its own career, vile by nature, unrepentant

While enthusiastic. If it were not for guile, there could be  
No truth, as the latter would scratch the devil's own eyes  
And the former? Well, it rides the horse of hope, deftly

But only under cover of darkness, a savage and rootless  
Component of self, deceived by none but me...



My plan to return home, in the end, was simplicity itself, to return along the road first traveled. I made the travel arrangements via the internet, and finally, began the search for a place to live upon arrival, again via the internet. A region I had visited a couple of years prior came to my mind, and I searched online for available condos, found what I considered to be a suitable one, contacted the identified realtor via email and made an appointment with her for some days after my arrival home. And le voila! I now live in that condo, shown to me by that realtor some days after my arrival home... but that is a story for a different journey.

I would spend a few more days in Paris and then in Amsterdam, utilizing the full ksj protocol before my passport quota expired. This predicament, my sense of unease and ultimate expulsion from the EU, seems symptomatic of the incipient distrust and even enmity that was rapidly developing among the world's major players. It does seem expected, this disaffection amongst the pillars of our world's peoples, whose leaders resort to war for reasons of their own, disallowing the common sense and the common will; expected, yes, but if only sadness were a policy that could quell and staunch this unholy flow of blood, then our tears could serve to irrigate this garden of life, and our shared pain could lace up tight this fierce and urgent need to fuss and fight, and would not that be just fucking all right!





## Success

When finally won, it seems to leave the taste of dirt in one's  
Mouth, as if one has been eating, mouthful by mouthful  
From the crypt. There is now only smoke and dust moldering  
In the taste buds, slapping bones and clacking extruded teeth  
Always smiling in their satisfaction with this death and

Disappearance: welcome home my corpse, leaving a stink  
Of hoax as your heritage and your legacy as well. Say  
What? You were thinking something else, I guess...  
Well, there is nothing else and there has never been  
It all began and now ends with this death of nothingness

An end that awaits with a welcoming kiss of return  
For from where else is there a place to receive us  
As nowhere is now home; and no one who has been here  
Could possibly return to there, as we are all foreigners  
To ourselves, only cadavers waiting, waiting...

And then gone. To where? From where? These futile  
And useless questions, framed by fools, for fools  
Unto a world of helpless and now nearly exhausted  
Players, a mirage of life and love and absence, now almost  
A habit, yes, but almost done too, leaving only the stank

Of farts and shit and each of their relatives in death  
To befriend that wanton smile, that prideful rictus  
Pretending to be our future in this, our success...

## Afterward

I think my initial intention with respect to this journey was to escape. To escape from what I had come to believe was the growing and intensifying depravity of the USofA. I guess, I had always thought the kind of morality checkers game my country liked to play—kind of two steps of progress forwards, and then one step of reactionary repression backwards—might in the end prove to be a winning formula, where equality of opportunity and equity in the allocation of resources, would be not just a proffered goal, but an actual societal norm, internalized and accepted, and happily so. Or perhaps, I had only always wanted to think that formula would be a winner. But living a life, learning about the world and oneself, can be a deadly journey, and it is often difficult to balance disappointments against optimism, especially when the scales seem so heavily leveraged by all that I found to be so disappointing.

So, ignoring for the moment that my European brothers and sisters first constrained and then rejected the passport of its American descendant (me, in this case!), what in fact did I discover about myself and about my European hosts, if anything, during my journey? Traveling itself is a wonderful teacher. The trick that must be mastered, of course, is to learn to become a wonderful student. Being a continuing student of life is an honorable profession, but being an enactor of life, with conscience, an awareness of self and species, and a smile, is heroic.









## Finishing

To finish... life, or love, or work, or worst of all, friendship  
As that is most like a small death, much more so for the  
One than is probable for the other—a wager or a bargain  
Though it does seem more a pirate's private pleasure (that  
One to be plundered, head and soul, if both be available)

While the one bleeds riches and runs away, always keeping  
Head between the legs, licking stiffened genitalia, engorged  
By its success, shamed only by the failure to take just enough  
To staunch the flow of shit from its own holes, there always  
Remains the other, a sorry sign of true motivation and vision

Held unto the end (as even shitholes have both beginnings  
And endings: it is only the middle passage that is missing)  
Really, that part which is a love for life—even as it now exists  
A grunting pile of forlorn and almost forgotten (festering in  
Memory, disgusting in presence) languishing pile of shiteria

It brings to my mind a fable: a turd whose asshole has long  
Been forgotten sets out upon a journey to find and then to  
Destroy all accounts that have ever been and all that could  
Ever be—it is for us our history, just another embarrassment  
Of failure and frustration, like a love affair with one's own

Shithole: there is nothing that can come out that has not  
Already been thoroughly masticated by that demon of self  
A bastard with ten thousand words who chews and spews  
Until the spawn of all lost hopes has been released, a darling

In a red dress, sporting scalding panties and rose-tipped breasts

Principles, now become axioms of evil, as principals must do  
And always will, requiring only a dressing down or out, or a look  
Or a deed, explaining one's self as necessary, only in the words  
Of a self-martyrized stack of stank shit, shit and more shit, piercing  
Every explanation for success, even the least and the last reason

To seek it, as if it were a sword stuck in a rock or a cock or a clit  
Throbbing in abandonment and completion, yet aching for and  
Arching toward a simple progression, that pathway laid down  
For fools and adventurers—blazing trails and trials of this and  
That, only ignoring the pain and pathos and final predictions

And most explicitly the children. For it is only them who would  
If they could, take it all back again, unfinished, without any  
Pedigree or beginning. But where and how does one start to finish  
And when? Or does one merely complete the beginning before  
Embracing the end, a fond farewell to finishing... and then?





## Getting older

Hey, I am getting older too  
And do not have much time  
Be it punishment or be it bliss  
Oh, my lords, who lends thoughts  
To such things as this...

Once a butterfly when I was  
Young, I did chase till I was done  
And now, just like my love in plight  
Spectacular in flight and brightly  
Lighted, but so too, quickly gone

There is a darkness comes at night  
That would claim your last bits of life  
But you must rise-up and fight-on  
It's true your right to die, but as you  
Choose, not as you lose, so do not

Falter, never say: I cannot fly...  
But, if I do not reach out to touch  
Who will I ever find to understand?  
A moment in time is not so much  
To ask my love, or say: Please stay...

But I took too long, I guess, and when  
I looked again, sadly pressed, she too  
Had gone, and now it seems it must



Be true, I do know why, why I threw  
My love, all my love... away today

What I really discovered during my journey was myself, all over again; my neighbors, my new friends, my more casual acquaintances and interlocutors, all experienced as if in replication of what I had left behind. A few startlingly unique, kind and good people (representative of some few more, unmet, I am certain!), many more who were working too much for too little, owning too little, hoping for too little, and worrying, of course, too much. Some few, finding themselves to be unwilling members of this latter group, were angry, disheartened and frustrated by this apparent impotence and failure, and discouragingly, these few seemed to be growing in number, ostensibly supporting and playing along with a time-honored, but still degenerative, game of hate and blame. Just like home to me, I say!

But there are many, many more people who face each day, often with a smile, working only to do their best at being a citizen of the world, respecting our spaceship earth, remembering always that we all are members of a very special and exclusive species (*homo sapiens*, we call ourselves, immodestly); a species facing challenges, challenges we should not, we must not, look beyond, for they are dire and threaten our very existence as a species, on this our spaceship earth. When the whole world seems to be the same, because its ultimate consequences are received and experienced by our species in the same ways (when exposed to the final reckoning of these results, I mean); then perhaps, we can proceed, going forward once again, advancing with our feet standing upon this our own common ground, with our eyes and thoughts directed towards each other. It is this journey that I hope to travel next, soon, perhaps.







## The Wanderer

I am dependent upon only gravity and lust. It seems being a prisoner of my imagination I cannot stop at this world's edges; nor can I view the cosmos as a separate neighborhood, as this is my homeland and I am privileged to be a microbe in this assemblage of majestic nothingness, sublime. I do not renege upon my commitment to eternity, though I hope it does not take too long, as I have a train to Rome to catch. I do not anticipate a problem with the universe—it's the universe which should anticipate a problem with me. I mean, for one thing, I do not want to relocate when I'm dead. I am already used to this fucking place—relocate? No, that's hell! And try to tell me it is in celestial reality only a lower echelon of heaven—my momma didn't raise no fool, and if she did, well, maybe she's not really in heaven, like she might think. I like to volunteer for parades—it's like being shit upon... so fine—notoriety is like being shit upon by a seagull while gazing out to sea, you know the shit could be all the way from Japan, or even China, or it could be your neighbor who trained his pet seagull to follow and shit upon you as a kind of existential mischief, yes? Whenever I am shit upon, I have a whimsy along those lines because it matters most what happens after the fact, when only fools retreat and heroes are etched out of time, and place, and bone.

The inversion of separation and rumination:

Existence is a trick played against the odds in a game of craps: death wins. I get the idea, but death wins every time? Well, you don't get the idea: we are not actually here... do you? We are precluded by the very audacity of assuming that we could be here, I suppose. I personally cannot complain—I've been gone for many years now, and yet, here I seem to be, again, smiling and relaxed, in my absence...



It is easy for me to feel bewildered: by my own thoughts, by the actions of others, by just about everything, really. But I have learned to possess my bewilderment as my own, and to feel comfortable and natural in doing so. And I do not feel unique in this condition, or perhaps just a bit about my level of comfort with it; but instead, I know, in as near to a universal sense as I can garner, that this is the natural state of our species. We are not born knowing. We are in truth immediately forced to learn to know, which is the beginning of a process we will be forced to learn about throughout the rest of our lives. Perhaps this not-knowing has been the root of our collective angst, and I seriously doubt that any obstacle along our evolutionary route has been more problematic than the management, and quite often mismanagement, of this phenomenon, not-knowing. Any number of wildly speculative dreams have been spawned within the vacuum of this absence, held in-check only by the boundaries of our own capacities for genius and madness, which are found to be, especially within this sphere, often without discernible difference.

Part of our genius is that we can invent and discover things that help us in this determined fight against our own ignorance and in support of our survival; but part of our madness is that, in doing so, we can imagine ourselves to be masters of the universe. Thus far, these two extreme elements of our species' psyche have been held, if not in balance, at least in-check; but I fail to see how, with the social systems and structures now in place across our species' domain of operations, this detente of emotions, if you will, can maintain itself. But again, these are sour grapes. Maybe we did not exactly plan to be where we are today, but that is not the same as saying we arrived here by accident. If there is a wild beast running loose in the house, it is our beast, and it is our house, I say!



## Index of artwork

- Pg 2 Royalty at Rest
- Pg 4 Reflections
- Pg 6 Steps
- Pg 7 Ms
- Pg 11 Lips
- Pg 12 Holy Redundancy
- Pg 15 Prom Night
- Pg 16 Sudsorium
- Pg 19 Cafe Disarray
- Pg 20 Death Visit
- Pg 23 From the sea, we came
- Pg 24 Eternity Lost
- Pg 28 Pagan Rituals
- Pg 29 New and Old
- Pg 32 Three moments to ponder
- Pg 33 Killing Ground
- Pg 35 Light and Flowers
- Pg 36 Paris at dusk
- Pg 40 Thoughts for a moment
- Pg 41 Juxtaposition
- Pg 43 Predators
- Pg 44 Dancing City
- Pg 48 God's summer home
- Pg 49 Mistress Moon
- Pg 53 Retribution
- Pg 54 Trickle down mystery
- Pg 56 Cannes Cadettes
- Pg 57 Monsieur Voltaire

Pg 60 Watchers  
Pg 61 Specimens  
Pg 65 Boats  
Pg 66 Spirit of Nice ascending  
Pg 68 Everything Nice  
Pg 70 Boats for the Gods  
Pg 72 Magic Mediterranean  
Pg 74 Neighbors  
Pg 75 With the trees  
Pg 77 Seeing and being seen  
Pg 78 En haut  
Pg 81 En bas  
Pg 82 Monaco  
Pg 84 At the theatre  
Pg 85 Home  
Pg 88 Amsterdamsters  
Pg 89 La Negresco  
Pg 92 Dog Park  
Pg 93 Flowers for sale  
Pg 95 On watch