



# **Garden Plots**

**Cantos 67-100**

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Kublai Khan: “I do not know when you have had time to visit all the countries you describe to me. It seems to me you have never moved from this garden.”

—ITALIO CALVINO, *Invisible Cities*

## CANTO 67

In The UNEVen stEPs Of Hung cHoW:

“A long shot reveals the courtyard as surrounded on all sides by a profusion of flowers and shrubs. I grow aware of many scents mingling in the heavy, honeyed air; and my ears fill with the immemorial humming of bees in innumerable bells. Of the variety of plant-life, there are borders of lavender, behind which the mixed blues of delphiniums rise to create a delightfully soothing effect; here & there, at the feet the yellow bursts of *Santolina neapolitana*. There are borders of lychnis, asters, lysimachias, geraniums, heleniums, and delphiniums, pink, blue, scarlet, yellow & white. There are borders of verbenas, tagetes, nicotiana’s, antirrhinums & pelargoniums, brilliantly yellow & red, purple & orange. There we see foxgloves, hollyhocks, & pink carnations. Here we see the white form of the grape hyacinth. Sweet-scented thyme, planted in tufts between the stones of the paths that invite one into the profusion, grows for the feet to trample;

here are also pinks, whites & yellows—saxifrages & alpine phlox. And forget-me-nots & low-growing heathers have been effectively used as ground-cover in this lovely corner—the perfect foil for the delicate coloring of the white violet rhododendron at the back. The pink & scarlet fuchsias, the blue, blue lobelias, trail from stone containers embedded in the wall that shelter this lovely spot from all unfavorable winds. A pergola, entwined with purple wysteria, abuts the rose-garden: of the hybrid teas alone, I can discern Chrysler Imperial Eden Rose, Grace de Monaco, Lady Sylvia, Madame Butterfly, Symphonie & Silver Lining.

To the East, an entire area of red, blue & white appears—the blues of Glory-of-the-snow (with its white eye), crocus, bluebells-of-England, primrose, flax, & the Virginia cowslip—or, if it is summer, rather than spring, of the speedwells, the bellflowers, & the long floriferous spikes of delphinia; the red of crown imperial, barrenwort, tulips, fire-pink, lugwort, peonies, & the or-or-iental puh-poppies...” (Here Hung Chow stumbled, uncharacteristically.) “...& the whitest, ah, the whitest! tulips, Narcissus, lily-of-the—valley, sweet William—snowdrops, sweet peas, peonies; &, at one point, what is either goatsbeard or spirea, I can’t quite decide;

&, piece-de-resistance, letters of baby's  
breath on a background of snapdragons,  
spelling out the superb sentiment,  
*No knowledge rightly understood can  
deprive us of the mirth of flowers.*"

I can tell by your silence that his words  
(and those of others, whom he quoted)  
have left you breathless. Long may his  
garden live; long may we read of it.

Selah.

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It is sad to add anything to this masterly piece of Hung Chow, but scholarship often delivers us to sadness, and there can be no exception in the case of "hung-cow," whom later unfortunate events revealed to be an imposter, in true life a barrow-boy from the Mile-End Road in East London, England. His real name, to the best of my powers of discovery, is Norman McGordon, whose early career, sadly punctuated by the loss of three or even four uncles during WW II, in which he himself was too young to fight, and he eluded any and all military attempts to impose on his free time for as long as he lived. This in itself has no shame in it; it is hard to think that any war the UK has fought during the last fifty years was worth the pain. But McGordon's career as a Chinaman transgressed the law of several countries and appears to have involved him on fraudulent, and massively fraudulent, actions. I myself am truly sorry to have been drawn into his career as a Buddhist monk, milking millions from an elegant and rich body of Londoners during the period of his life when I knew him.

My only excuse is, that I myself believed he was a Chinese Buddhist Master at the time. Close to a million in Pounds Sterling was he to pluck from me, and I only hope I do not run into him on a dark night. I might not be responsible for my actions. That said, I now must speak about this flowery work I here printed from McGordon's own lips. I can verify that his sumptuous gardens held all the flowers, and others, he names here. But I omitted all that he said that I found deplorable; today, in the cause of truth, I shall quote it here.

First, the introduction, which ran more-or-less as follows; "I study my navel. Hours of minutes pass in this fashion. Eventually, with a downward swipe, my navel is replaced by the protuberant, fatal navel of a starving child. You know, the way they look when they show documentaries about capitalism on TV? This child is starving because the land his parents, in common with their fellows, used to farm, has been stolen by a multi-millionaire expropriator. Next, the navel dissolves into a beautiful fountain of white marble; gracious jets play from its

several openings into a pond resplendent with *Nelumbo nucifera*, with the characteristic large leaves, fragrant, pinkish flowers (symbolizing luxury & heedlessness) and broad, rounded, perforated seedpods. Now, in a kind of tilting and panning process, I see this fountain plays in the center of a courtyard paved with huge, asymmetrical flagstones of various colors; these have been recently hosed down, and sparkle and glitter in the brilliant, mid-morning sun.” Then the paragraphs I have quoted in the main body of this work ensue.

But at the end, following upon his quotation about the mirth of flowers, Hung Chow continues, “Trained across the south-facing wall are nectarines and peaches. Beyond this wall lies the palace of the multi-millionaire. A green door in this wall opens, and through it steps a man in his middle years, somewhat more than medium height, a rather spare figure (McGordon then weighed a morbidly obese 270 pounds!) dressed in blue and golden robes of oriental cut, contrasting markedly with features almost [!] Occidental in their handsome strength, and making the wispy, long, gray beard depending from his chin to seem merely glued into place.

“But Master! The figure you describe is none other than yourself!” I could not help but exclaim.

“Yes, indeed,” Hung Chow replied, “and I seldom looked happier, wouldn’t you agree? But I’m doing alright, wouldn’t you say?” he continued, before I could decide upon an answer.

“Behind that bamboo curtain is a giant color TV. I loathe and despise myself for watching it. Therefore, in this drawer here, I keep a pipe, and some opium. Finest grade. It cost me a pretty penny too, I don’t mind telling you!” As soon as you have left (which I trust will be very shortly, as my tolerance for human company has reached the end of its tether), I shall wheel out the set, turn it on, recline on this rug in front of it, smoke a pipe, and pray that the drug takes over my faculties before the first commercial comes on. Don’t forget,” he called as I was crossing the threshold for what at that moment, I feared would be the last time, “next meeting, the next monthly fee is due! Tell the others!” The ornate door, with its embossed dragons, closed firmly behind me, and I was left to negotiate the steps in complete darkness.

## CANTO 68

And there is a lower Garden of Eden and an upper Garden of Eden. In the lower Garden of Eden the souls dwell in the forms of the bodies that they were in, and they enjoy there various types of spiritual pleasures, and the place has been prepared in accordance to the types of pleasures that were decreed to exist there. In the upper Garden of Eden, the souls dwell in their true essence, and enjoy various types of spiritual pleasures that are greater and more exalted than the pleasures of the lower Garden. And there, there are changes of time and seasonal changes, for different pleasures that continue to change and there are different levels for those experiencing.

—*The Way of G-d* by Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzatto,  
*Ma'amar Ha-Ikkarim B'gan Eden V'Gehenom*

The labyrinth trembles  
    & the garden has both a pulse  
& a smile. Someday, we'll find the center.

It seems a short distance but a long way  
    & it's hard to conceive  
or praise  
    what must be  
perfect content. Hard to be  
    content  
with form only—

walk the dog, wash the car, push the cart, prune the bush. So wrong  
and so right, crude and too perfect  
    whatever.  
(Basically, what does *whatever* mean, anyhow?)

Tap gently and keep moving.

"Listen," said Hung Chow, "After the first 10 to the minus 43<sup>rd</sup> second,  
there's  
    a new layout to the Universe.  
First, a ball of strings  
    then, a butterfly of gas in flight!

You ask, 'What's before emptiness?'  
    Nothing  
I have words for. Pull back  
    the curtain of the sky  
    and enter  
the mirror that is  
the World of Nun,

chaotic & watery, w/out sun.”

Hung Chow and I spent long afternoons in his garden & long evenings  
in the infinite shadows.

I listened & I listened & I listened.

A woman, heavy into Vajra-breathing sat next to me. I thought,  
“Long-stemmed beauty,  
it’s a summer night, there’s moonlight, & we’re in a very old garden.

This is a dream where I awake saying,  
“It’s a dream & I’m driftin’  
in infinite space or  
no space, dream kisses,  
free ‘n’ easy, on my lips.”

Before long, it’s bumpy & chaotic  
& before & after & up & down, here & there play tricks.

Then, out of energy-mind, a s(park,  
*Paradise, a walled garden)*

w/

Light coming f/ the sunrise  
beyond the actual sun  
geometric & smooth.

## **CANTO 69**

This morning I received a letter from Norman McGordon, he whose

emulation of a Chinese wisdom master had long fooled me, & from whose acquaintanceship I had for some years removed myself, feeling that a man capable of his mendacities was no fit company for one who, as myself, had removed himself from such imbroglios in order to perfect his assumption of residence in the Fourth Heaven. It was he who had come by my address; I hadn't the faintest idea how; not, certainly, through any effort of mine, for the Fourth Heaven fills my heart, & the days of my friendship With Mr. McGordon feel faint & faraway, as though—& this is true enough—I had suffered, by knowing him, experiences I had not the slightest wish to repeat.

Had it been a letter, I doubt I should have opened it. But it was simply a postcard & I had read it before I could conjure the wisdom to stop. It had said, "I'm making a porno film & I never looked better. Love all over, Norman (Sturgis)." The return address was in London.

A porno film? What had become of the wisdom master of five years ago? Before I had thought of what I was doing, I had written a quick note & sent it to him, for my Fourth Heaven training is to heal any breach instantly. "Dear Norman," I wrote, "I am glad that you for one had not allowed rumors of my death to deter you from corresponding with me. I note that you are living in London again & shall go there immediately. I am looking forward very much to seeing you again & to ingesting your aura. Yours in the 4<sup>th</sup> dimension, David."

And so, a couple of days later, I went to his flat on Pembridge Square, early enough to catch him in, rang the bell & enjoyed his expression of surprise when he answered the door. "Thought you was the bloody rozzahs," he said, amiably. "They're looking for some girl, but they keep pushing my bell. Come on in. It's downstairs, right?"

He ushered me into a space crammed with apparently unread newspapers, a few books, & items of clothing draped higgledy-piggledy from the stacks, one of which he sent to the floor with a flourish to clear a chair for me. I let the boom! of cascading papers die away before asking, "So you're not sitting down at home any more?"

"In a bit, in a bit," he answered absently, like someone listening for a sound he could not hear. "You wasn't tailed, then?"

"Not that I noticed. You know, since my death, I've acquired the power

to dis- and re-appear whenever I want.”

“Blimey,” he said. “Say, that must come in real handy at times.”

“Well, yes, but I can’t be sticking gold ashtrays in my pockets. They’d show up.”

“That’s too bad. I bet we can figure a way. I didn’t know you was dead. I shook your hand just now. Same as ever. Maybe you was always dead. Ha Ha! What’s it like, then? Any sex?”

“No, dammit. Oh, mostly, we wander over the Elysean Meadows talking like really good novels.”

“Which ones?”

“*Doktor Faustus. The Magic Mountain. Brideshead Revisited. The End of the Affair. Doctor Zhivago. Quiet Flows the Don. War & Peace. Chekhov,*”

“O yeah, you always was a Chekhov fan,” he interrupted. “I remember when you played that major in *Three Sisters*. Poignant. Well, & so you’re dead? Looks a lot like bein’ alive, to me.”

I sighed. “Okay, watch this, then.” I made myself invisible. It was fun, floating there above Norman, watching him stare wildly around the room. As I assumed my human shape again, he started, then let me have it with both barrels.

“Never pull that on me again. I mean it, kid! I have special reasons for asking that of you. Kay?”

“It was wrong of me,” I gladly admitted. “Just high spirits.”

“Yeah, well, just remember. That’s all. Now listen up. I need your help. It’s dangerous—but it won’t be to you. I’ve got a mission to run. I’ve got to leave here right away & head for Cambridge. You’re all the help I’m looking for. In fact, you’re a fucken blessing in disguise. Ha Ha Ha!”

I had never seen Hung Chow laugh. Norman’s laugh was Titanic. Unbelievable, that a man about to steal an atomic bomb from a cabal of mad scientists could laugh in that way. I shivered. I realized, not for the first time, that Norman was insane. But after all, who wasn’t? Clever people, that’s who, that’s who were the best disguisers of their crackheadedness. The noxious creeps. It was always an imitation show they were putting on. it was like listening to 95% of the papers at an academic conference. It was hearing a lonely woman you hadn’t aroused

telling you that she had, really, come, thank you so very much. I waited impatiently for Norman to have a shave & finish dressing. It had taken me only three minutes to put on the police constable's uniform, which fitted me to a 't', that he had found for me, and the shoes that went with them. Eventually, Norman reappeared. But at first I couldn't recognize him. One thing was clear, however: he hadn't pissed all of his Hung Chow money away. From his Derby hat to his \$200 shoes, he said 'Money'. His face had also altered. He was wearing his detective look. All the druggy frowsiness of his face had vanished. He looked like a cop, & a very important cop at that.

"If it's all the same to you, Constable Bromige, we'll take your car. And he took a moment to show me the car in his garage: a 1928 Model A, freshly painted with fine pinstriping.

"Yes, sir, I think your choice is correct. Nice job, though." I opened the rear door of my car for my friend, then my driver's door, through which I entered, took my seat at the wheel, & started it up. He gave me directions through west London, but once we were on the road to Cambridge, it all came back to me. We were mostly silent throughout our trip. I could tell that Norman was deep in thought. A major action was being planned. When he did, at last, speak, I was unready & missed his words. I asked him to say that again.

"What was that song that began 'You, who are on the road'?"

"Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young. And Jerry Garcia on steel guitar."

"Sing it with me." So I did; before we were done, we were both in tears.

"I'll rive those little bastards something to live by," he sobbed. Then, a minute later, drying his face, he added "Little know-nothing punks." And with these words, we entered Cambridge.

There were the troublemakers, in the middle of the untidy crowd they had attracted. This knot of people was just a block downhill from Magdalen College, assembled where the sidewalk widened just as one crossed the Cam. The crowd was mainly youthful, but we could see the ringleaders of the treacherous rebellion instantly. Apparently there were just two of them. At first I thought, two men, but as we began to find a

way through the crowd I saw that the thin one was actually a woman, wearing a dress that had apparently very little to conceal. She was forty-ish, & her face told one at once that her best days would never come again. Her male companion, however, wore the face of a man who still knew how to get what he wanted out of a lonely waitress or an adulterous secretary. True, he was balding and overweight; but his hair was bushy at the sides, and his fifty-ish face, enhanced by long days in the middle-English sun & nights likewise long in the local hostelryes, was ruddy, & his remaining hair, fetchingly silver. In fact, he looked like such a codwallaper as to seem incapable of engaging in an honest day's work, let alone jiggery-pokery with an atomic device; but there before me was the evidence, a shell-like device about two feet long by eighteen inches in height & width, painted Army brown.

It sat on a piece of the cityscape that was ornamentally raised to about waist-height. To look at it knowing what terrible power it possessed made my skin crawl.

But Norman had already swung into action. With a straight right, he had the balding man dropped to his knees. Then, as voices of adolescent English protest began to cry out, he flat-handed the woman in the face, so that her tottering dignity was suddenly skinny-shanked shame, sat flat on the sidewalk with her skirt around her waist—I trust that she wore under-clothes; I myself did not check that out. Now a young blood from the crowd stood forth to challenge McGordon, but a left hook followed by another of those fearsome straight rights, reduced his interest quite swiftly. Norman held up his wallet, open to a police photo of himself (but where & when & whyfor taken, who could know?), then, pocketing his wallet, turned on his heel, took the bomb under one arm, and marched back to my car. Now I saw why he had pasted cardboard over my license plates, at a pee-stop I had made just before entering the city bridging the Cam.

To be continued...

## CANTO 70

““Ere, ‘alf a mo,” said Norman, regressed now to his half-real cockney accent. “Where the fuck are we?”

“Its’ one of those loop roads built in my absence,” I told him.

“Mine too,” he muttered. “We gotta get this mother back to the target area before we get traced & spotted.”

“Sounds like a grade school drawing assignment,” I told him.

“Drawing doggies this year, are we?”

“Don’t give me any of your sauce, my boy,” he said sternly.

“We don’t ‘ave time to fuck around. If the real rozzers catch us, it’ll bricks & mortar for thirty years or the rest of your life, whichever comes first. Doesn’t mean much to you, being an angel & all.”

“I’m no angel, I’m merely immortal. I could come back as a hot-water bottle, or a white rabbit, or a centipede.”

“Blimey. Seems like you’re worst off than me. Except for the invisibility bit.”

“The hardest part,” I told him, eyeing the road, “is that I have to be honest, not to my own feelings, but to what the Prophets & Dakinis have revealed.”

Silence. I drove along, northward, looking for the coast. Finally, as I knew he would, he got it. “So you’re not taking this back to London, you creepy bastard. Right?”

“I’m looking for King’s Lynn. The least we can do is drown this horrible lump.”

“It’ll detonate as soon as you chuck it in the water.”

“Perhaps. Perhaps not.”

“Fuck you! How did I get mixed up in this scheme with you? You of all people! A dead man! Now listen up,” he said, calm again, “See this pistola in my hand? It’s here to tell you it’s way past time to turn round

& head back for Westminster. If you drive at 80 mph, & Blair is exceptionally long-winded, we can just make it. That's how I want my life to end. 'Nuff said?"

"Norman," I replied, "we'll soon be out of gas. When we stop for gas, I shall become invisible. I shall head for the phone. You might shoot me there, but you might not. And the gas-station world will see you blasting away at an empty phone booth. I think, they'll likely call the police. But if you want to shoot me, now's the time. But it's likely if you do that I'll crash the car. That's how I see it, anyway."

Silence. I took out the roadmap & checked it. We had enough gas to get past King's Lynn. "Why can't you take me to Parliament, then go invisible & fly away?" asked Norman.

"I'm not allowed to make myself invisible for the wrong reasons."

Further silence. Then a big sigh. "I want fish n chips in King's Lynn."

"Me, too."

"Ah," he said, settling back, "Now I've got to think about tomorrow & tomorrow &—"

"Tomorrow?" I added, helpfully.

"Nah," he said. "I got to work my car."

An easier silence filled our vehicle as we crossed the marshes towards the coast. But comfortable as he seemed, Norman was troubled by the atom bomb. There wasn't quite room there, in my back seat. Chief Inspector McGordon weighed at least 250 lbs. & was 6 foot 2. I heard him becoming exasperated with something, and then ripping metal. I glanced round.

"No, Norman, that piece of superstructure you've dislodged means that the bomb will explode in two minutes."

"You're puttin' me on."

"No. there's nothing we can do."

"Well, fuck me. So this is it, eh?"

"It will be, in 90 seconds from now."

Silence. Then: "Well, David. Thanks for your help. This'll be big in the Daily Express."

"Norman, I like it that we'll be going together. Although melted."

"Yeah, I suppose there won't actually be any remains."

“It’s hard to think what’s worth saying when there’s only 50 seconds left.”

“All things must pass,” said Norman, quietly.

“Now,” I put in, “is the only time to live.”

“I miss my mum,” said Norman.

“How about your Dad?”

“Never met him.”

“What happened?”

“He was killed in the war. At, uh, mm, El Alemain.”

“Did you have any brothers?”

“Oh, yes. They were all in the army. They were all killed at El Alemain too.”

“What rotten luck! How many were there?”

“How many?” he replied slowly, & then finally answered. “Oh, three or four.”

Before I could solve the puzzle this presented, however, I realized the two minutes were up & we were both still alive. “The bomb should have exploded,” I said.

“Not yet,” he admitted, nervously. “But it might any moment. Why don’t you fly off?”

“I couldn’t fly beyond range of a nuclear explosion in less than half an hour.”

“Well? Who knows?”

“I don’t want to be a cockroach. I might eat you.”

In this way, living on the tips of our tongues, we reached King’s Lynn. I drove quickly through clusters of traffic, then saw the water. I headed for it. We parked near a beach and took our deadly equipment down to the sea. Norman had his pants rolled high up his legs. “I’ll take this,” he said. He paddled out until thigh-deep, then let the bomb slip beneath the little waves. “That’s the best we could do, under the circumstances,” Norman was saying to me over kippers and beer. Our consciences were still fairly clear, because if the bomb were to go off now, we would be incinerated. But a couple more pints reduced the size and likelihood of the threat, & after we had tanked up & taken the highway for London, the threat of a nuclear explosion seemed no more than a bad dream.

Dream on, McGordon! Dream on, Bromige! Dream on, all of us!

## CANTO 71

A notepad & a pen are to hand, as I sit here in the garden & try to put together those impressions I have gathered, over these many years, of Norman McGordon, good friend as he has been, & still an enigma to those of us who, like myself, a man of mystery who, like all mysterious persons, is on occasion capable of instilling one with awe if not terror. After all, when last mentioned in my writing, Mr. McGordon threatened me with death for blocking his intention to blown up the House of Commons! And yet, as my readers will have noticed, later that same day we enjoyed s fish 'n chips dinner in King's Lynn, drinking beer together like the best of friends.

This transference of identity is a full-fledged condition of this man. What could have caused it? World War Two, in which his considerably older brothers fought & died, is the No.1 cause I can determine—although not everyone whose experience parallels his, has turned out like him. Surely the deaths of his older siblings traumatized him; I recall that a cousin of mine was killed when a bomb he was helping load into a bomber slipped & fell to the ground, the terrible sadness I felt at the funeral, & for weeks thereafter; I vowed never to join any branch of the Armed Services, a vow which was in part helped to grow in importance when my own father, wounded twice in World War One, made me swear never to do so—never! (Although he would always add, “But if you do, make friends with the cook.”) And I never did. When the Korean War broke out, I went to Canada, which had no draft at that time; by the time the Vietnam Not-Officially-a-War was raging, I was a diabetic, a father, & a graduate student at UC Berkeley.

But back to my Uncle Norman, as he came to be called, I know not why, for we were unrelated by any such bond. In fact, we didn't meet

until I was in my early 30s, & he, in his mid-20s. My life was a quite varied patchwork in those years: writers, publishers, booksellers, dope-dealers, fellow graduate students were just some of my friends & acquaintances; when some of these brought Norman by my home, I registered him but dimly; he was not like the usual passers-by of Berkeley; a metaphorical distance surrounded him, what I took to be a native stand-offishness. In short, I didn't know how to read him, and meanwhile, my life was crammed with interesting texts.

However, fascinating as I find the subject of my youth, our subject here is Norman. It's strange, to think how little of my interest he aroused, during the first weeks & months I knew him. Looking back, I think the trouble was this: he was just too big. My father was fat, but he was not above 5 foot 8 in height. My mother had a number of brothers who stood taller than 6 feet, but the Bromige men were all shorter than I. I think that was the trouble with Norman, that he was too big for me to befriend. Nearly all my men friends around that time were at most, an inch & a half higher than I, while most of them were my height, 5 foot 11, & most of them, shorter than that.

The first time I was aware of my liking for McG was the day he came to dinner, when Robert Duncan was also a guest. Robert himself was no more than 5 nine in height, & possibly more like 5 eight. Why this pair, who seem to me even today to be an unlikely couple, had been invited to the same meal was a matter of accident, something having gone amiss in both men's schedules, something my wife & I were stuck with rather than something we had hoped would some day happen. To my surprise, & then to my ever-growing delight, they took to one another like a bug takes to peanut butter. They were instantly united by their joint inability to let the other have the last word. It wasn't at all a romance; it was not love, even love at first sight; it was more a matter of devil take the hindmost.

They spoke, often both at the same time, for 3 hours & then realized that they were both going back to San Francisco that night—although originally, Gordon had said he wanted to spend another night in Sebastopol—& we saw them backing down our driveway, still deep in conversation—a conversation, according to Robert, that continued

without break until they reached the city & had to find different bus lines. To the best of my knowledge, they never met again. But this increase in my discovery of Norman did not lead to an increase in our friendship—not, at least, in the way of our keeping company with one another. He went back to England, & thence, one heard from others, to the Orient; I met him some tears later but did not recognize him as my Buddhist Master, Hung Chow; then interceded a further gap in our friendship, augmented—the gap, that is—by his retaining the gift of one million dollars I had given to him to fund his career as a Zogchen Master. I had won the million through an inheritance that cost me no effort—I had spent little time with my father’s third wife—so the Zen gift seemed an easy way out; later, when I realized the money had gone to McGordon, I had some regrets; but what is done, is done, & besides, my wife wanted to keep at her charitable work, while my pension from college teaching, plus my old age pension, plus hardly anything from sales of my books, plus the small emolument of royalties from Canada for books sold there—let me mention, for instance, *Piccolo Mondo*, the novel where some of these characters, poignantly younger, disport; of these characters may be found again; of course my forty books, books of poetry & prose, celebrating the word ‘perhaps’.

Perhaps, McGordon will celebrate my widow Cecelia in his will, for, to tell the truth, I feel she has come to the end, surely, of her good works & earned a few years of free time before she too has to find her way to my side in this blatant heaven (the fourth) half-Sufi, half-Tibetan, which turns out to be where people such as us find themselves after the mistake of death.

But I wanted to speak more of Norman. Mr. Big, I like to call him; for everything about him is that, his voice with its many well-mastered accents; his ability to shift his body & limbs so that he can be, one minute, a frowsy old soak, then, the next, a keen-eyed detective radiating power—“I’ll tell those arseholes where they’re going to spend the next five years.”

Today’s question, though, was whether Mr. McGordon was at home in Pembridge Square, enjoying what blow was presenting to him from a tv

show; or whether instead, he was returned to his obsession with the Atomic bomb we had left in the wash—“No need to bother your head over that A-bomb, missus, it’ll hatch a thousand years from now—just when King’s Lynn is a popular seaside resort!”

After checking his home, & noticing his car was not there, I decided to drive to the sash to see if the bomb had reappeared again. I parked where no one was in sight—odd, for it was one of those blustery, chill summer days when the English love to get some fresh air & exercise—I stripped down to my bikini & took the plunge. But nothing, nothing except a surprisingly unfaded dinner jacket could I find. After wading ashore & toweling off, I dressed, although not before I tried the dinner jacket, clammy thing, & found it twice my size—funny, but it put me in mind of that middle-age Cambridge man whose bomb McGordon had taken—so that I decided to inspect the pockets of the dinner-jacket. Cards & notes clung to the wet material, but all writing had been erased; however, what had I here? It was a pencilled address, an address not a mile from Pembridge Square. I gave up my investigation of the wash & teleported myself back to London.

Once there, I took ten minutes in a public wash room to make myself look as disorderly as I could. Thought the torn Macintosh added the right touch. I knocked at the flat-door indicated on the card, prepared to make myself invisible at a moment’s notice; but the young man who answered the door said, “Greetings, friend. I was beginning to fear you were going to miss the show. Well, no time to talk, we can’t miss the greatest opening of Parliament, eh?”

We grabbed a cab. En route I discarded my sweater and the raincoat, likewise torn.

“Good idea, man.” My companion stripped off the funkiest of his clothes. We ran into Parliament, my companion flashing passes whenever necessary. It was packed, as I’d expected, a full House. But, my sidekick told me that there were two seats reserved for us. I gave him a rabbit-punch in the hallway that dropped him to his knees. I picked up his backpack—he would never have gotten it past the police in there—& took off in the direction we’d just come. I held the bomb to my body,

letting my shirt flap as I ran. Outside, then to the Thames, where I flung my burden into those deep enough, I hoped, waters. I has no idea how it had come back into the hands of these two-bit maniacs, nor did I know what good it had been to toss it in Old Father Thames. An atomic explosion from that range would have wiped out Parliament. Even the good souls.

But no awesome explosion came, either then or later. It was a dud. Now all I wanted to find out was if a connection had formed between Norman & the Cambridge suicide bombers. I gave much of the following weeks over to that task. But I never saw any sign of one.

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The explosion reported—tardily—by the Norwegian coastguard after a lone man in a small fishing boat vanished in a huge explosion in the Baltic sea, & that happened six months after the incident described above, may well have been an accident of Scandinavian origin, & no blame is attached by the Home Office to Mr. Bromige, although they will always be glad to have a word with him. We understand, however, that he died some time ago, before the incident described above. The Norwegian authorities, on the other hand, would very much like to have a word with him, & any clue as to his whereabouts would be welcomed by the Norwegian government.

## CANTO 72

*Everybody has a story to tell and if I had a wish for humanity for the new millenium it would be that everybody had the opportunity to do so. Listening to and telling each other stories. This is what the world should be about.*

—Ariel Dorfman, December, 1999

Welcome to The Physik Garden, a long-term collaborative project between a group of artists, designers, healers, writers, poets and gardeners. The Physik Garden began its life as a collaboration between the artists Simon Larbalestier and Michael Eldridge. It has grown to involve a team of people whose intention is to look openly and intelligently at all aspects of creativity and well-being.

The Physic Gardens of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century were healing places for mind and body and special herbs and plants were grown in particular configurations to serve this end. This project is more about a metaphor for experience. The Physik Garden explores the plurality of existence; it exists in real time hidden in the mystic hills of Central Italy and yet it has its virtual life here with its own perpetual motion developing and maturing 24 hours a day.

<http://www.michaeleldridge.net/physikgarden/goed.html>

The Field of Cultivation:

Compost Heap

Timberlines I Essay

*Canto 73*

Timberlines II Poem

"It's a Mess"

*Canto 74*

The Glasshouse

Well Scene

*Canto 75*

The Field of Cultivation:

The Shed

Om on the Range

*Canto 76*

Diamond Hanging J

*Canto 77*

At the Helm with

Lu Garcia

*Canto 78*

Hinterland

Woodnotes

*Canto 79*

## **CANTO 73**

Timberlines.

Heal your world. Plant a tree. I ran a small, independent bookstore for twenty years, and I subsidized it for fifteen of those years by planting trees every spring, returning something to the earth.

During that time I worked for two companies, Eastern Washington Reforestation and T.G.T.B.T. Eastern Washington Reforestation was structured like a co-op, although legally we were a partnership, and we had to appoint someone from our group to sign our contracts. Davy Simkins signed one contract as Galactic Emperor and another as Galloping Antelope. The name Eastern Washington Reforestation was a bit misleading since most of Eastern Washington is a desert.

T.G.T.B.T., Too Good To Be True, was a legal partnership of two, and they picked up the pieces of Eastern Washington Reforestation after it dissolved. For the most

part, we contracted with the U.S. Forest Service, and most of our planting was in the state of Washington, in the districts of Ellensburg, Chelan, Okanogan, Entiat, Mt. Baker, and Wenatchee, but some treeplanters planted year round, going east to Utah and Montana and south to Oregon and California.

There is an art to treeplanting. We begin by instructing a new planter that "the green side goes up." Some never get it. It's a mystery, and like any good mystery, there is an inspector and a plot. There are scores for planting too high, too low, too close, too loose, for planting in duff, for how you make a scalp. And then there is the dreaded "J root." The less said about this the better. A low score means no pay. I know in the battle to save the planet, treeplanters are thought to be on the front lines, but actually, treeplanters are the lowliest vermin in God's creation. Many a boss goes down to skidrow to pick up a couple of drunks and takes them into the woods in their street shoes and gives them a bag and a dag and sends them into the slash to prove to the inspector that he has a full crew.

Hell, this ain't a forest, it's a toilet paper farm. Nothing really romantic about treeplanting. Ah, life in the woods. I can remember moving camp after planting all day and pitching my tent in an arroyo and waking up with a river running through my sleeping bag, getting up to a breakfast of pine needles in my scrambled eggs, and then fishtailing it up a logging road at dawn with AC/DC blasting from the speakers to slam a few trees into some rocky slope in a downpour, or sitting in a hot springs among ancient cedars and coming back the next year to find a gurgling mudhole in a clearcut. For six years after a fire, we planted Silver Basin in the Entiat Valley. Then, in another eight years, we came back, and for a year we thinned the trees we had planted, and the following year, the valley burned.

Here is a lesson in impermanence, if I've ever had one. I figure, on an average, I planted 500 trees/day for 30 days/year for 15 years. That's somewhere in the neighborhood of a quarter million trees. I guess I've helped the planet. I guess I've guaranteed there will be pulp to make paper to replace some of what the book industry uses every day. I suppose a forest planted in rows is better than no forest at all. I look at Mt. Rainier, as I fly over it, and I realize it would be hard to get lost in this "wilderness." You would only have to walk a mile in any direction to find a logging road. Any vision quest is going to be checkmated before it gets started.

I have set choker with loggers who want to see the last tree felled. I have hugged

trees with environmentalists who want zero cutting. A war between tree huggers and tree cutters serves no purpose. We need a trillion trees to restore the forests, and if we are going to continue to cut, we need to catch up. On God's green earth, only a human can plant a tree.

## CANTO 74

### IT'S A MESS

by the creek where I squat  
with nosebleed after smacking  
my face in the slash

a crisscross of fire-hardened  
barbed sticks, o mama  
the dead forest, and the hills  
lush in bitterbrush and ceinosis  
sea of noses

o mama  
is there hope for the trees?

slashier slash  
rockier rock—this little unit  
has snow on it and's unusable

out of shoot #1  
it's Flaming Hoedag  
ridden by J Root

o mama  
there is hope for the trees  
Orpheus instructs the treeplanters

Watch those scalps  
keep an eye on spacing  
Don't plant too deep  
No J roots  
I only want to see asses and elbows

we plant ahead of progress rates  
into full pay with laurels

we're paid to plant a tree,  
and we'll come back  
and back again until it grows

the trees—  
out of their depth  
with this logic,  
driven around in vans,  
debated about like dots on a map

Go Fir It Reforestation  
in the Land of Many Abuses

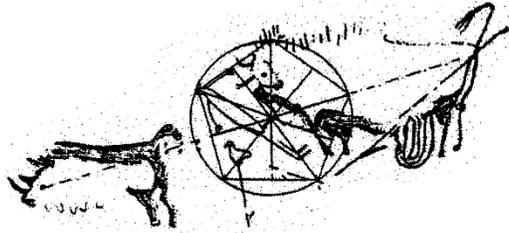
we're trying to plant in a week  
what destroyed in a day  
took 1000 years to grow

## **CANTO 75**

### **Well Scene**

We go back now to 23,303 BCE at dawn on the autumnal equinox. The wall of

the Well has been prepared to receive an underpainting of ochre. The rhinoceros is painted in the superior style, although it is unfinished, so it appears to be *drowning* or disappearing over the horizon. The paint used to model the hindquarters is blown on a wet surface, and the front legs are casually sketched.



The man is rendered in cartoon style, and the bison, drawn in broad strokes, is a combination of both styles. Many commentators have noted this mixture of styles, and the painting has been used as an axis from which to tentatively chronicle other paintings in the cave.

The *twisted perspective* has been interpreted to mean the artists could not draw in renaissance perspective, so the head of the bison was drawn in  $\frac{3}{4}$  profile to show the animal turning. Actually, this is not so much wrong as it is not taken far enough. The position of the hind legs and the shading of the rhino, even the partially rendered front legs and the position on the curvature of the wall, combine to make the figure move out of the composition. Many editors printing a reproduction of this painting crop out the rhino and the six dots entirely.

The birdman is very rigid. The front of the bison is also stiff and two-dimensional, and the left front hoof is turned so the cleft is visible. The spear bisects the hind quarters of the bison, and there is a break in the shaft, as there are breaks in the dart and the staff, suggesting a coordinate system with the iconography of eyes, nose, thighs and toes all loaded with symbolic content. Every kind of perspective is utilized. Given flickering torchlight and a hit of psilocybe, a holographic paradigm of cosmic proportions emerges, but I'll leave off describing a Cro-Magnon ceremony.

## CANTO 76

## OM ON THE RANGE

Om ky yi yippi, can a beatnik be a cowboy? and how. "Cattlecountry, Love It Or Leave It!" 800 acres with a section under irrigation. 300 head of cows with calves rotating over four fields. Cheri and Theo and I pack our household and head for the prairie. We are accommodated in a two-story Tudor style stucco house with a view of Mount Rainier's sunrise side. The boss just bought 10 head of Hereford cows with a duke's mix of calves.

The squeeze chute is dysfunctional, so we rope and wrestle the calves for branding. Diamond Hanging J Floating I. I pick out a green-broke part quarterhorse, part thoroughbred mare, who twists like a snake in hot water. She picks up cow savvy pronto.

The land is irrigated from canals built during the 1930's Land Reclamation Project. Water flows out of Lake Keechelus in the Cascades Mountains near Snoqualmie Pass. The head ditch circles the Kittitas Valley and supplies small, single family ranches. A hundred head of cows, a crop of timothy hay or silage corn, fancy horses, beet farms and vineyards. This is the old Ingersol Ranch at the far end of 4th Parallel Road in Badger Pocket.

The land is laid out with four forty-acre fenced fields under irrigation and 600 acres east of the ditch—rangeland, greasewood, rattlesnakes, coyotes, chuckers, and badgers. Never hem in a badger.

Setting water. The water district allocates a certain amount to each ranch based on seniority, need, and the supply in the reservoir. A ditch rider drives the road to check that the flow is set at the right mark. Woe to him who rustles a little water, he'll find a padlock on his water gate. Remember, during the Watergate Era, Nixon said, "I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant." This is as clear as it gets.

I push my water. I keep the cowpies out of the corrugation. I spread it out. Run it up hill if I can. Get the ground soaked without letting it run into the neighbor's field. There's an art to this. My neighbor, Glen, gives me pointers. We walk the pastures, and he points out difficult features in the lay of the land. There's always

fine tuning can be done, but mainly it's a matter of covering the ground, getting the ground wet, and moving the water to the next parcel. And the cattle eat the grass, and by the time they are finished in one field, hopefully the next field is ready for them.

After the herd has been rounded up and brought in from the outback, they are deliced, tagged, dehorned, given shots, a shave and a shine. Then they are ready for the green pastures. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* sustains me: "I am that food which eats the eater of food." Count the stock. And again. Still one heffer missing.

Down by the west fence line, four legs stick out of a catch ditch. Eyes rolled back, nose bleeding, my presence adding to her fear. I dismount, tie my horse to a cottonwood branch and check out the situation. More than I'd want to rope and tie, I wrestle her to her feet. Moaning, she makes for the feed. She'll be alright, if she can walk and eat.

Later, I tell Glen, and he guesses I was some kind of lucky. I see a hide on his fence. Says he's lost one. No sooner born, it coughed up its guts. So, he goes down to the "graveyard" (a place for orphaned calves) and buys a new calf, one whose mother has a blown udder. Dress the new calf in the dead calf's coat. Cow takes it for her own—calf graft. "This morning," he says, "I smelt something dead in the barn. That skin rotting from the calf's heat."

## CANTO 77

### DIAMOND HANGING J FLOATING I BLUES

I mend the fences.

I tend the herd.

The shit is ten feet deep  
and the shitters play for keeps.

What are you after, they ask  
a hoof in the mouth?

The shit is ten feet deep  
and I can't eat or sleep.

Coyotes yap all night  
at the blown moon.

The shit is ten feet deep.  
Shine on, shine on.  
Hold it down, you buggers  
or I'll rope your ass, I sing.  
The shit is ten feet deep.  
Hay has more than doubled in price.  
There's no market for feeder steers.  
The shit is ten feet deep  
and clings like it's alive.

Pour on gas.  
Set those doggies afire.  
Give those cow a hotshot.  
The shit is ten feet deep and thick.  
Chew your cud, mama  
let those juices flow.

The shit is ten feet deep  
and sometimes it hums.  
The shit is ten feet deep—  
here & there a head protrudes.  
The Angus are black  
purgatorial beings.  
The Herefords are red  
mythological monsters.  
The Charolais are white—  
easy to spot against the dung.

The shit is ten feet deep  
and covers the fences.  
The shit is eleven feet deep.  
My shovel is hooked to coke.  
The shit is beginning to climb  
making inroads through the hills.

The shit is infinitely deep  
and running still—running.

## CANTO 78

### AT THE HELM WITH LUIS GARCIA

Gone is The Garden Spot. Gone is The Black Sheep. Gone the Cinema Guild & Studio. Gone Big Daddy's Bookstore. Cody's Books and Moe's are still there, although both Moe and Fred Cody have left us. The Mediterranean Café is a ghost of its old self, but regardless, Berkeley is still Berzerkeley. Lu and I drop down from the Rose Garden to the campus. We pass California Hall, where The Berkeley Poetry Conference was held in 1965, cut over to Faculty Glade, wander past The Pelican Building and out Sather Gate. Lu is talking.

"Snyder was telling very directly and essentially his view, his perception of what his work was about and what the world was about at that point (in the early 60s), and the way I got it was that he thought there was a real potential for the world to change, and the reason why that struck me as really interesting is because, for one reason, it's because I didn't feel that way. I may have wanted it to change in that way, but I really didn't believe it could, and I still don't, but I think that in some ways I wanted it to be that way so bad that I kind of believed that.

"But I don't believe that. I believe that individuals can change themselves, if they do, for whatever reasons, if something happens, some kind of catastrophe, something demands that they somehow change, and they usually have to work years and years and years and years to do that, and then they do; they're transformed by that work into somebody who's generally very alienated; and they're out there with all kinds of thousands of millions of people who find no need at all to change. And that's the way it is; and that's the way the world goes; and then the next transformation is being able to survive as an alien in the world.

"So, that's kind of where I feel I'm at. I mean I see where a lot of intelligent

people have gotten involved, but there's nothing that they receive that they call nourishment, whether it's success or money or whatever, from the world that would force them to change. They never encounter anything, usually, until it's far too late in their lives to change in any way that would transform the world, and so it doesn't happen.

"So, Snyder was talking about it in this book *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, which he started forty years ago, and this new section came out, and I went to his reading at St. John's Presbyterian Church on College Ave., there, in the Sanctuary, beautiful setting, and this one section he read, that he read at the very end of his reading, really hit home, that the world as a whole had a potential to change. Absolutely beautiful. Strong.

"I mean, when I was around Berkeley in the 60s I knew a lot of people involved in the Free Speech Movement and all that stuff, you know, Kate Coleman and Jonathan Cott and all those people, Joe La Penta, who were really involved, but I was always kind of an outsider, partly because I didn't go to Cal; I went to Junior College when I went to school; and I was always fouled up on drugs, and I didn't real believe things could change; not that I didn't want them to; I did; but I didn't think that you could change anything about greed and people and who they can't help being, and in that sense I wasn't on board, and they didn't really want me on board, but they let me just sort of hang out, and I was just bearing witness, just like I'm still doing now.

"You write a poem. You're feeling really strongly, OK, you're shouting, they're shouting, 'Take off your clothes!' but these people aren't going to take off their clothes; they're not ever going to get naked, you know; they're never going to come clean unless something happens to them as an individual; nothing in their whole way of life is going to be an incentive to make them ethical; they'll just go on being pathological liars and crooks because they have to be, because otherwise they would just be slobs like me and a lot of other people in terms of the kind of money they will have the potential to make. It doesn't pay them to think about change, basically. There's nothing in it for them.

"So, unless the world completely crashes, which it nearly has anyway, being so polluted and fouled up as far as I can see...everybody's just in denial about it...I mean there are organizations that work to change the world, and all of this has to

go on; it has a purpose unless we just want to throw up our hands.

“Ok, I’ve come to this place where I’ve done a certain amount of that work, and frankly I’m pretty exhausted, and I’m just resting up for the next round on a very personal level, because it’s fine to work for change, to try and change evil, or whatever it is, and that’s fine as long as you don’t let it kill you. I’m just saying it’s hard to change things, and unless you have the skills, it’s scary. I’m trying to write the story by looking at the stars and figuring out my bearings by the day to day living.”

## CANTO 79

### WOODNOTES

Seek to realize the self—  
the way, the poets say, is difficult.



We are situated in a cedar cabin built on stilts over the water in a cove a mile across Moser Lake from Deep Bay, our mail drop, Deep Bay 99901. Mail arrives weekly from Ketchikan, 25 miles by plane weather permitting. Mid-winter-there is four feet of snow.

Elizabeth and baby Theo and I,  
helped by friends, take to the woods  
after reading Bradford Angier's  
*How to Live in the Woods on \$10/Week*.  
With my last paycheck, income tax return  
and promise of employment insurance  
we should make out—hoping that  
by discriminating use of ecological resources  
most of our material needs can be met—

Selfless means to a selfless end,  
as Ghandi put it.  
So around this complex  
our routine flows—all activities  
merge in the pursuit, which deepens  
here in Deep Bay.

Schedule remains firm.  
Implementation of spiritual discipline,  
Karma Yoga—wood and water  
wood and water, wood and water.  
Would you believe, wood and water?

Elemental—the meaning is subtle,  
but we're only scratching the surface.  
We have stored away necessary  
supplies, several cords of wood  
cut and split and stacked.  
Now we improvise.

Awoke to a 14 foot tide, high  
enough to float a forty-footer off  
an abandoned logging donkey.  
Tied on and rowed it to shore.  
Tied up and came in for coffee.

Sometimes, I'm the ocean,  
man—boat—ocean.  
I wonder how hard the wind can blow.  
Whips us from the east today.  
Whitecaps in the cove, cedar bending.  
Gulls motionless in the gale.  
February is a windy month.

Can we use up our desires?  
Not that we don't have sense cravings.  
Food is Number One God here.  
And Shelter.  
And the twin god, a good pair of Boots.

Made a mixture of vinegar, water,  
cloves, onion, garlic, salt, mustard,  
sugar, ginger—for sauerbraten.  
Put this mix and a venison roast  
in a stoneware crock to marinate.

By the way, I'm told  
Ramakrishna uses the simile of the ocean,  
the ocean of *sat-chit-ananda*  
the ocean of existence,  
consciousness, bliss—dissolve  
myself like a salt-doll in this ocean.

Lu Garcia writes from Berkeley,  
“Things spin as they always spin.”  
Jon Springer, at this time, finds it  
“fetid in the Ukrainian ghetto of 6th Street.”  
How did I get from selling Berkeley Barbs  
on Telegraph Avenue to this cabin?  
The old personality breaks down, and  
the world becomes pure—like Blake said,  
as it is in infinity.

It is curious how some moves take  
years to come about, but then  
done with full support of mind & body  
they move forward.

The wind gathers strength.  
As weather delays delivery of oil,  
as the Coleman stove is in parts,  
we cook over a makeshift grate  
in the Yukon oil drum heater.  
Elizabeth achieves bliss of sourdough  
chocolate cake, cerealmate bread,  
venison stroganoff, and fern fronds.

Living in the woods is a fruitcake idea.  
Can others be influenced by seeing how  
it's done?—expanding circle—friends,  
town, state, country, galaxy, cosmos  
returns me back to myself.

Snowflakes falling outside  
and in my mind—the temperature,  
40 degrees—nothing sticks.  
I roam the woods.  
Tongass National Forest.  
Sitka Black Tail Deer. Beaver. Squirrel.  
A few bear.

While dark, I take to the woods.  
When dawn cracks, I'm waiting.  
I'm a good shot, felling my game  
with a single round from a 30.30.  
Death, sorrow, sort of unreal,  
this tug of life and death.

Repression, exploitation—  
leaving the city to avoid the establishment,

and, in turn, I become the Man.  
Good weather, one clear day in thirty  
in this rain forest—ego hunting—lots  
of weird animals in the mind—the mind  
itself a crazy monkey.

As I rave, the Governor of Someplace  
makes money in real estate.  
Dr. Leary attends Altamont, says  
it is a lesson to be learned.  
Theo and I float in our boat, while far away  
Neil Armstrong takes his giant step.  
Hunt and fish, wood and water.  
Today, eight crabs in the trap.  
Cut and stacked cedar blocks,  
using the tide to move them to shore.  
I came indoors to paint the cabinets  
until Theo knocked over the paint can.  
Put him down for a nap and read  
a few chapters of Thomas Á Kempis.

Field studies:

*Periculum aquillium*

a perennial fern, local species, hog braken  
substitute for asparagus.

Theo gets up early to pick the frawns.

*Tiarella trifoiata*

Quileut word, “gwaqwlatcyu'l”

three leaves (qwal'l=3)

Chew for coughs.

*Equisetum arvense*

field horsetail

Used by Quinault to regulate menstrual flow.

While reading this aloud,

Elizabeth starts her period.

We have no ailments in the woods,  
except when we go to town, we catch  
the “Ketchikan crud.”

A whirly-twirly, sunny day.  
Here it rains 200 inches a year.  
10% chance of rain means 10 inches of rain.  
Made ice cream and had mincemeat pie  
à la mode.

Watched a sea otter dive for crab.  
The sky gualoises blue, the water  
a shade of jade and now smooth.  
Buds & bugs & migrating fowl signal Spring—  
I feel like pulling the doors from the jambs,  
but I'm afraid of the ceiling falling down  
f/ a ton of newspaper & mattress insulation.

Cut and split another cord of wood.  
Supper of red snapper filets, scalloped  
spuds, and sponge cake w/berry sauce.  
We haven't seen a soul on the water  
for days— grooving on the isolation.

By kerosene lamp I read Lone Wolf Smith's  
letters to the Daily News, always a revelation—  
Not one new goat trail here.  
What for our Poor People and trollers  
more rotten Pinks from Creeks  
and let Coho go?  
Where o where is Gov. Hinkel's  
Better or Bitter way?  
Not sure I want improvements.  
Sit and watch the deer on the beach,  
watch them turn their heads, twitch  
their ears suspiciously.

A little bird settles on a branch,  
listen to it sing.

## CANTO 80

### Of An Evening Chez Ho San:

“A curious fact concerning writing,” Hung Chow was saying to us, “is, that we have our experience which may haunt us, and that we then propose to discover an underlying principle in it, which may lay the ghost.” As ever, I thrilled to hear our dear Master commence his discourse. Into the midst of the most deplorable and vacuous of times had come this dynamo, this man of high moral tone, to show those of us who still had the use of our wrists how to screw the hinges back onto the doors of civilization!

“That is,” Hung Chow went on, “The scatter of experience as it passes through us, headed as it were in the opposite direction from our forward-seeking selves, is not enough for us to feel we have lived full lives. If we cannot determine from profound contemplation of what has happened to us some simpler, less cluttered thing, which I have called a principle, for it is some sort of idea then indeed our lives have been lived, as we say, in vain. Still, it is the experience itself that haunts us and appears to exact this something more from us, its agents, so that our very lives boil down until no thing is left except the exemplary. So be it.

“I recall once when a dear friend, Ah Wei, had made her first TV show, that neither of us had a color TV set to watch it on. I thought of my friend Ho San, and called him up. Ho San and his wife, the lovely and gracious Hai Tin, would not be home that evening, but sure, we were welcome to come over and help ourselves to whatever we could find in the kitchen and to watch TV until the playing of *China the Incredible* if

we so desired.

“It’s a large, well-appointed house, with a patio, covered with corrugated plastic nailed to stout wooden crossbeams, that gives onto a charming garden, entirely fenced-in and with barbed wire atop the fences to keep the TV and the stereo in the house where they belong. After Ah Wei and I had snacked in the kitchen, seeing that the evening was a mild one, we decided to step into the garden to enjoy the air and the celestial display.

“The door clicked behind us. I tried it. It was locked. I tried the other ground floor doors and windows—locked, all locked. I attempted to climb over the fence so that I could go to my car with Ah Wei (should she also prove capable of scaling the fence); not only could I not get over it, but I had, I realized, left my car keys in the pocket of my Chinese smoking jacket which was, along with Ah Wei’s outer upper oriental female garment, in the kitchen. The evening, rapidly deepening into night, was with equal rapidity growing colder.

“Only one course remained. If, by standing on a chair I had found on the patio, I could pull myself up onto the first crossbeam, I might then crawl along this to the roof proper. The slope of that did not appear too steep, and I would then find myself at an upstairs window which looked to us to be slightly ajar—although of this, in the gathering night, we could not be sure. But there was one obstacle: my terror of heights. When I was sixteen, I fell from a card-table to a marble floor, damaging my coccyx. Ever since, I have allowed others to retrieve the parakeet from the chandelier.

“Tonight, however, the alternative was to remain in the garden all night, in the increasing cold, while Ah Wei, despite her protestations to the contrary, if indeed she should utter such, might be secretly despising my cowardice. In fact, at the very moment when I was thinking that thought, my eyes met hers. Before I knew it, I had hoisted myself up onto that crossbeam, and, by concentrating all my narrative powers on each inch of the trip, on hands and knees, moving each one gingerly forward (for the beam was no more than eight inches wide), until I got tired of this and completed the crossing with the mad dash of some crazed arboreal mammal, I reached the roof proper, up which I

scrambled, heart beating wildly, to find the window was indeed slightly open: one push was enough to dislodge the catch; it swung open wide, I climbed inside, ran down the stairs and opened the kitchen door and held my dear friend Ah Wei tight in my arms once more.

“Later, we went upstairs in the usual way, turned on the TV, and lay back to watch Ah Wei’s image go through its paces without noticeable error and with much verve and vivacity. I believe I neglected to mention a significant detail,” our Master now said, one hand raised to his mouth in the gesture of apprehensiveness, “or did I say that, while still in the kitchen and before we stepped into the garden, Ah Wei and I had eaten a brownie laced with resin from the hemp-plant? It looked a lot like the little cakes I was eating when you all arrived this evening. And did I say that I couldn’t remember how long after eating this it was before we stepped outside, because we had smoked a reefer also while at the kitchen table? So that my deliberations in the garden were loaded, so to speak, in the direction of what I call Now-or-nevers-ville. What if I were to forget what I was doing, halfway across the roof?”

“Friends,” Hung Chow concluded solemnly, “the brownie of death is already in us. We ingest it at birth along with our mother’s milk, and very good it tastes, too. If we do not wish to spend our lives in the cold and the dark, there is something we must do. Something important. Something I could no more forget than I could my own name.” He looked at us for a little spell and then, indicating the disciple next to me, said sharply, “Are you paying attention?”

“Oh yes,” the disciple replied.

“Excellent,” Hung Chow resumed. “If we do not wish to spend our lives in the cold and the dark, we must realize that the door where through we entered is barred against our return, that its circumambient fences are locked and barbed against us, and we must find the faith to hoist ourselves onto the narrow crossbeam that is The Way, taking care not to place the Weight of our Trust on the Green Uneven Plastic of Deception, until we can gain the Steep Roof of Ambition about to be achieved, and can squeeze ourselves through the Window of Self-realization before the Marijuana of Oblivion overtakes us! Then and

only then can we descend the Stairs of Complacency and undo the Kitchen Door of Circumstance from the inside, then and only then may we honorably embrace the Vessel of our Hopes, then and only then may we surrender to the Rhetoric of a Job well-done!”

After Hung Chow had remained silent for several minutes, we understood that his teaching for this evening had come to an end, and, rising, we bowed and allowed our dear Master to usher us to the door which, as the first of our group to attempt to exit shortly discovered, led into a broom-closet. Hung Chow apologized, uncharacteristically, for through the door he next led us to, which opened onto the familiar midnight street, I could hear his antique laughter growing fainter as we picked our separate ways down the uneven steps.

## **CANTO 81**

### **O**f An Afternoon At The Beach:

At the next meeting of the group, one of us asked our dear Master which part of the story he had told us the previous week was the most significant. Was it the mysterious moment when, by an act of sheer will, he had hoisted himself up by his own bootstraps, as it were? “He who hoists self by own bootstraps lands painfully on knees, and no as-it-were about it,” Hung Chow replied, with a smirk transforming his revered countenance. “I shall answer your question with another story,” he went on. “But first, are there any further questions anyone wishes to hear himself ask?”

At this, Di-lan Sto-nan raised his head. “What other experiences have

you had with drugs?”

“Drugs?” Hung Chow muttered querulously. “I do not take drugs. I find them as frivolous as your question is impertinent. Life is not to be spent in popped sleep. Rather inquire, whether any event occurs more than once! That’s the kind of question I can get my teeth into. Should I be swept out to sea one dark night, you will be able to identify my corpse by the impressions in my answer, should I have happened to lose all my teeth.

“As some of you know, I have a son. The incident I am about to tell of occurred during one of those summer days that begin so early, the light almost green until the sun breasts the hills that guard our inland valleys and is caught for a moment in the lower branches of a tree, a lop-sided square in a stylized pine-and the dew disappears from the leaves of the bamboo, and turns up on the brow of the man who is cutting it down, and it is not yet ten in the morning, and the day stretches before one like a white beach filled with shells, only these shells are a thousand and one delights, like a sentence that sounds as if, given the speaker of it has sturdy lungs and a grammatically acute memory, it also, like a day in June, would never end. We decided to go to the beach.

“As we breasted the dunes, Ah Wei and I, with my son To Fa and his friend Nai Tan, we spied a number of young persons spelling out *Fellowship* with their bodies. They were from a Christian missionary school. To Fa and Nai Tan sat down to tie the shoestrings of their sneakers, but really to check out the girls. The missionary told us it was a good day. We thanked him for this information with our agreement. Courtesy required no less. Actually, it was a cold day: the fog that so often bathes our shores during the summer months was rolling in; had I bethought myself of this likelihood, we should have gone elsewhere. Nothing,” Hung Chow admonished us, “I include in this relation, is irrelevant. For this is art, whereas, back in nature, we had, of course, resolved to make the best of matters by ignoring, if we could, the inclemency of the weather. We had brought with us the equipment needed to play our ancient Chinese throwing and hitting game, which we did until Ah Wei and I were exhausted, and left the lads by the sea’s edge to stroll in the dunes.”

Hung Chow now addressed me, “Ya Han,” (which was not my name), “that last sentence was as banal as anything you might have said.”

Even before the blush had completely suffused my face, our revered Master went on, speaking once more to the group as a whole, “Our brother is one of the dullest and least apt talkers ever to stop a glottis. Mark my words, he will become the scribe of this outfit. I, au contraire, think too fast for the quill. Speak, therefore, I must. Necessity has made of me one of the most delightful talkers ever to discriminate a hawk from a handsaw. Thus, if a dull passage emanates from me, do not rest, but be assured, that it means something.”

He stopped, and I knew he was creating a space for each of us to think just what it might be that he had meant. I must confess, however, that I was still too thrilled with his flattery to think straight. I had scarcely collected myself before his narrative resumed:

“Yes, it was a day like any other. Who has not stood on that shore and looked out to sea? I cannot convey to you how normal everything felt—because I am telling a story, and you expect the extraordinary. There was nowhere for a cry of ‘Help!’ to emanate from. A few small clusters of persons, recumbent, some roasting bamboo shoots over driftwood fires; the lads, dashing here and there across the sand; a couple of hardy souls splashing about in the shallows; an official on horseback warning one not to eat the shellfish; indeed, during our stroll, Ah Wei and I had remarked to each other, how mellow was each person we passed: and this despite the cold.

“The rhythms of the ocean, which always make me think how the Unconscious laps and thunders upon the margin of Awareness like so much Eternity flailing the husks of Time from the grain of an Intention, these rhythms were having their accustomed effect upon the collective psyche: a moth was being hypnotized. On children, of course, it has the opposite effect. Adult tranquilizers speed the growing child. And To Fa and Nai Tan, being 16, were coming and going between the contrary responses. Here they came, now, dashing towards us. I must confess I

was annoyed at this imminent interruption. I had just laid the groundwork for an interesting hypothesis concerning the projection onto what we laughingly term *the outside*, of our inner needs: obviously, I was saying to Ah Wei, given that we term true what we take to be real, and that we believe what we take to be true, and that our perceptions underwrite our beliefs, and that these are governed by our expectations, which we derive from what we perceive as truly real and really true, obviously, I was in need of help. For there came that eerie cry again: Ah Wei had heard it too, demonstrating that she, also, felt, however irrationally, the want of assistance. And just as I was about to incorporate this fact into my summing-up, my own son was going to interrupt me!

“Even worse: he was not going to interrupt me. He and his friend were stopping short, just where a couple reclined beside a small rubber raft. Next, we saw the boys were borrowing this raft. I ran after them. Strong swimmers though I knew them both to be, I was not about to allow them to risk their necks in that notorious riptide, and, as I caught up with them, I told them so.

“My children,” Hung Chow said, interrupting his story to look at us all with an expression both solemn and bewildered, “Can you believe this? They refused to listen!”

A murmur of incredulity swept around our reverent circle. “That,” Hung Chow said, as if in an aside, “was rather an expression of credulity, if you think twice. But who has time to?” he cried, returning to his theme. “They would not hear me out. They told me that someone was drowning, out there. They indicated a youth shivering nearby who had, they said, told them he had been trying to rescue his companion, but had been forced to give up, due to chill and fatigue. And with that, they were gone.

“And so it is,” Hung Chow said, with a tone I had never heard in him before, “that we come and go along the margins of Time, quite unprepared to see those we love dash into the white stuff of Eternity. We would sooner they stayed here, on the many-colored beach, which it is, if you examine the little bits of stone and glass closely enough.

“I stood on that beach, and I cursed, watching the boys kick through the breakers, holding the raft out in front of them. I cursed as they vanished beneath a wave. They reappeared in the trough on its far side, and I cursed again. Despite the nearness of my dear friend Ah Wei, I stood on that beach alone. I had less stamina and strength than they had. How could I help, if they got into trouble out there? I would be helpless. I was already helpless! Oh, how cursed the stories I had told to these two at bedtime when their hair was still cut straight across their forehead—stupid, silly tales of heroism, just such stuff as they were now attempting to perform!

“In the stories, of course, the hero always succeeded—always outlasted the dangers. We had moved up from the ocean’s edge, to see what was going on better—and there, in another trough, we saw the boys manhandling their objective onto the raft. They began to kick back to shore.

“But the riptide was driving them back out to sea. Undoubtedly they were losing strength. I turned to Ah Wei and told her I was going to run to the nearest hovel and call the coastguard. Possibly the boys could keep themselves afloat until a helicopter could be brought in. But when I turned, on the crest of a dune, they had vanished. The ocean was empty. No sign of them remained. It was as if they had never been, never had played horse on bamboo stilts, never had smiled with excitement and anticipation up into my eyes and demanded one more chapter, just one more, please, before I turned their light out.”

In the long pause that ensued, I could hear one of our number weeping unashamedly. I swallowed hard. How dear, how vulnerable our Master seemed in this minute! I would have given almost anything to have his own story come to a happy end. As if he were reading my thoughts—and this, I was often convinced he could do—Hung Chow smiled, gently, as our eyes met, and started to speak again:

“I had been mistaken. And so, to tell you the truth of that, I deliberately lied. I could see no other way to make the experience real to you. The ghastly emptiness I have just evoked was at that time the constant possibility. But then, as I turned to look, here they came, raft, rescued

and rescuers, plunging through the final breaker and staggering up through the shallows, lugging the raft behind them. A wave collapsed onto the sand and shattered into a million decisive particles.

“I ran down and satisfied myself that they were alright. The youth they had saved, a member of the missionary group, was being attended to. A great wave of relief washed through me, and then, a great wave of pride. And then, quicker than you can decline the first person singular, I was thinking how glad I was that those tales I used to give them to dream on, had ennobled their hearts and enabled this deed today!

“Possibly those stories had made no difference. Possibly the Categorical Imperative is more than the delusion of an unruffled, impoverished little East Prussian professor of incredibly regular habits. Possibly this and possibly that, for the head, my friends, usually goes on talking after it has been severed from the body. Let me get back to mine.

“The parents of the youth wrote a letter of gratitude to my son, thanking God that He in His inscrutable wisdom had sent To Fa and Nai Tan to do His bidding that afternoon. I thought this a roundabout method of making heroes. Far be it from me to mock the necessarily simplistic faith of simpletons, with its pathetic attachment to mechanistic principles of cause and effect. Some money would have been nice. Or even a notice in the newspaper. But no doubt the missionary did not wish to draw any more attention to his inability to police his flock.

“In my son’s opinion, let me insert here, the letter was welcome, and all that was called for. I believe the act itself was for him its own reward. And that, he may call God. I reminded him of an older belief, namely, that, having saved this person’s life, To Fa must now be responsible for the rest of it. To Fa, rather thought it should be the other way round. As a parent, I was happy to hear that.” And thus he went jocularly on.

“I wanted, simply, to tell that tale,” Hung Chow said. “Why? Because it concerns a noble deed by two persons very close to me. But were I to leave it at that, the egotism would be inexcusable. We want a deeper significance to rescue us from the heave and suck of the merely personal. We half believe we have heard such already, calling out to be saved from the narrative riptide. The small rubber raft of interpretation

must be somewhere on the beach of this discourse!

“But language can no longer bear the burden of simple tale told simply. Without the wet suit of the referent, that sole preventative to the co-participation between the cells of the swimmer-listener and the oceanic teller, the subject will unquestionably soon be dead.

“However, seeing that we are primarily semiotic animals, my son and his friend had a few suggestions they desired me to pass onto you, and perhaps this pragmatic gesture will rescue this evening from my self-indulgence and your own: for you have listened with an attention I must assume, for your own sakes, to be sincere. Of course,” Hung Chow said, with a twinkle, “there are those who will maintain you were merely hypnotized.” And with that, he snapped his fingers several times in quick succession, which act startled us into laughter.

“First of all: when in real trouble, never, never shout ‘Help!’ It is too threatening. People will choose to suppose that you are joking. To Fa and Nai Tan supposed this, and only the accident, so to speak, of the shivering companion, told them otherwise. Since we expect ‘Help!’, we do not hear it. Our guard is involuntarily up against ‘Help!’ Your message will not penetrate the hide of conscience, which is the place one must reach if he expects another to risk his life for him. Better to cry ‘Wolf!’ But when your turn comes, they suggest you try something more catchy: ‘Wake up, I’m shrinking!’ perhaps, or ‘I regret to announce that I am quite apprehensive because I intuit my story is about to end!’ It depends, of course, on the degree of turbulence in the waters. Even on the calmest day, I would not advise shouting, ‘Deconstruction is moving me into the domain of its autonomous parts seized as entities and expressed directly as the isolated actions of a surface!’ (as was actually uttered by Steve McCaffery in *The Death of the Subject*, 1977.)”

Hung Chow continued to jest with us as we were putting on our overshoes and sou’westers. “It might be best to shout, ‘I’m drowning and nobody can stop me!’ From my lifetime spent observing the human, I’d say that just might do the trick. Or, obviously, ‘Now nobody will know where the deed to the condo is buried!’ And yet ‘Help!’ was what

he called, in this little story, and help was what he got. I suppose one would be unwise to count on such a coincidence, however.”

He was still chattering away as I stumbled down the final step and walked out of earshot down the rain-swept, rickshaw-studded street.

## CANTO 82



for Richard Running Deer & Cheyane

Where do you come from?  
Before anything  
there was dirt  
a breast-shaped mountain  
a valley, a plain  
just dirt.

Mother Nature wearing  
a dress with many pockets  
looks over the land  
and bends low.  
Moving her hands  
She makes clouds.

Taking seeds from her pockets  
She throws a few here  
some there, some in the valley  
pfff, pfff, pfff  
some on the plain, pfff, pff  
and on the mountain, pff.

She stands up and the clouds leave  
and She calls Father Sky.  
“Bring the sun over here.”  
This is on the first day.

On the second day  
She takes a look  
and makes adjustments.  
She says to Father Sky  
“Take the sun back  
back further, over there!”  
And She takes some seeds  
from a pocket way in the back  
that She’s never used before  
pfff, pfff, over here  
pfff, pfff over there.

Mother Nature is a lot like us.  
She’s never satisfied

always making corrections  
pfff, pfff, pfff.

Then She takes the water people  
from a pocket near Her hem  
and sets them to one side  
and the winged people  
and the four-legged people  
from yet other pockets.

She takes the two-legged people  
and sets them to one side  
and says, "Pay attention  
don't say anything.  
Watch what I do  
and I'll explain later."

This story goes on.  
Mother Nature adds  
and subtracts. She points  
the water people toward the valley  
and the four-legged people  
to the mountain and the plain.

The two legged people  
beg Her to have their place  
but first She tells  
the winged people  
to fly over the land  
and report back to Her.

She invites the leaders  
of the peoples to a circle.  
The Bear tells the humans

“I will give you wisdom  
but you can’t hunt me.”  
The Elk offers bones  
for tools and hides for clothes  
and meat for food.  
The Fish promises  
to keep the river water clean  
and the Eagle to carry  
messages to the Great Spirit.

And the story goes on  
for a long time  
and I may have forgotten  
a part, like about Coyote  
promising to be a teacher.

Conquistadors come with their firesticks  
and the Bluecoats with their rifles.  
Now, we’re in the time  
of the third language, T.V. land  
and Mother Nature looks over  
the breast-shaped mountain  
at Bobcat bounding  
from an alter at Tara Mandala.

A new moon.  
Yip yap and yowl of Coyote  
screech of Hawk  
and drumming sounds  
from a yurt at the base  
of the Continental Divide.  
East meets west  
we’re back to basics.

Wood and water, water and wood  
the energy of Vajra  
song and dance.

Our love of the land  
is our comfort and strength.  
This the Ute people know.  
This the Buddha people know.  
The sangha is a circle.  
Here is where we are from.  
Awake to the scent of rabbit ear sage  
ears hear fire, eyes see light  
all one taste.  
Garden of fire, garden of stars  
garden of air

## CANTO 83

On the banks of Lethe,  
bathed in light and melody,  
I felt the power of old love.  
Laura showed herself amid a veil  
of heavenly flowers,  
and with accusations and rebukes  
led me to the Upper Garden.  
Here follow her words,  
as best as I can transcribe them:

*"dx/dy for short 0/0*

*3.14159265358970323846264338327950 CADAEIB7EC*

*79910BCAD7E7D0CA0B91X"*

joycean thunderclap

binomially transformed

trinity-nomik-aftzqlfax

twixt number & word,

there's a little extra for good measure

when there is more than *i* bargain 4

9 times out of 10,  $n+1$  approaches the square root of minus one

is it enough?

is it enough?



The seven candelabra,

like seven stars,

rotate

as if a Great Bear was looking

for a place to lie down.

Things in the Upper Garden are true in a different sense,

the shape they take, this now, now that, w/ Love

as the manipulator of

multiples.

My consciousness

now had a finer vigor,

and I could appreciate how its terrain

had once grown wild & noxious

from being untilled & badly seeded.

**CANTO 84**

**COMPARE  
THEM TO  
A GARDEN  
AND THEY  
WALK ON  
FLOWERS**



CANTO 85

sheme

welay

today

flowers

beneath

where

welay

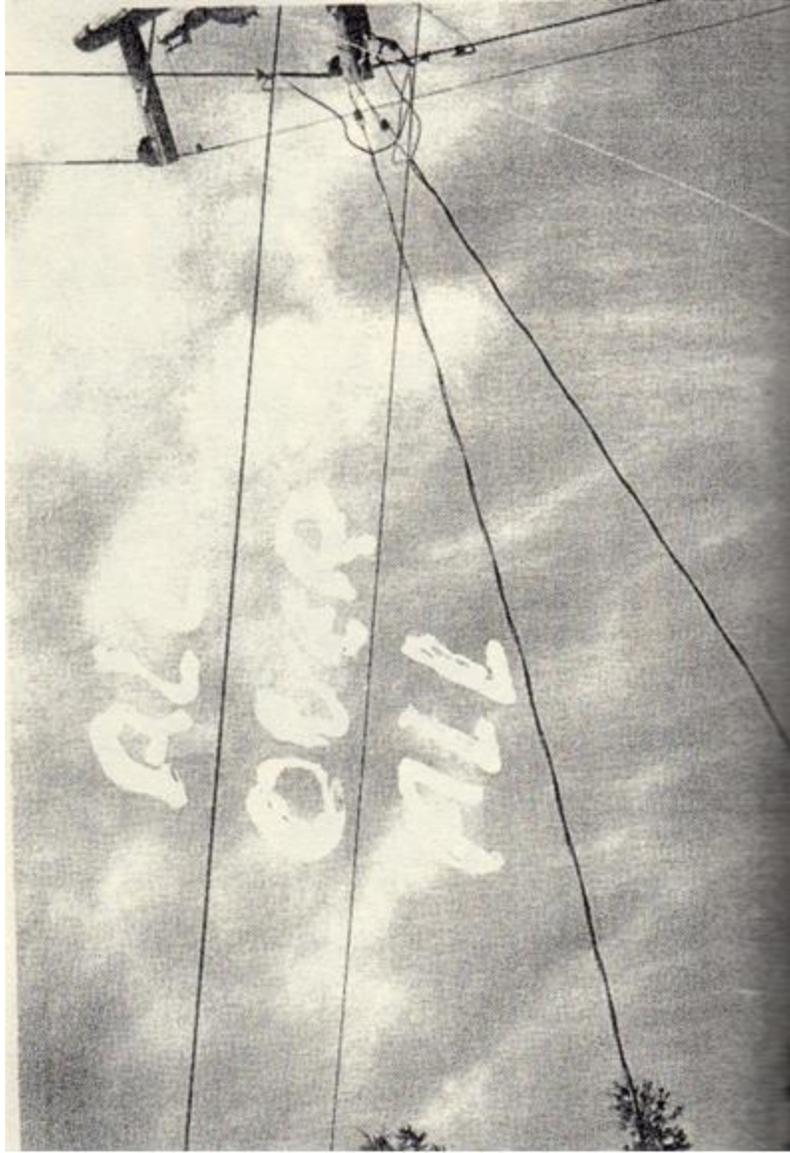


## CANTO 86

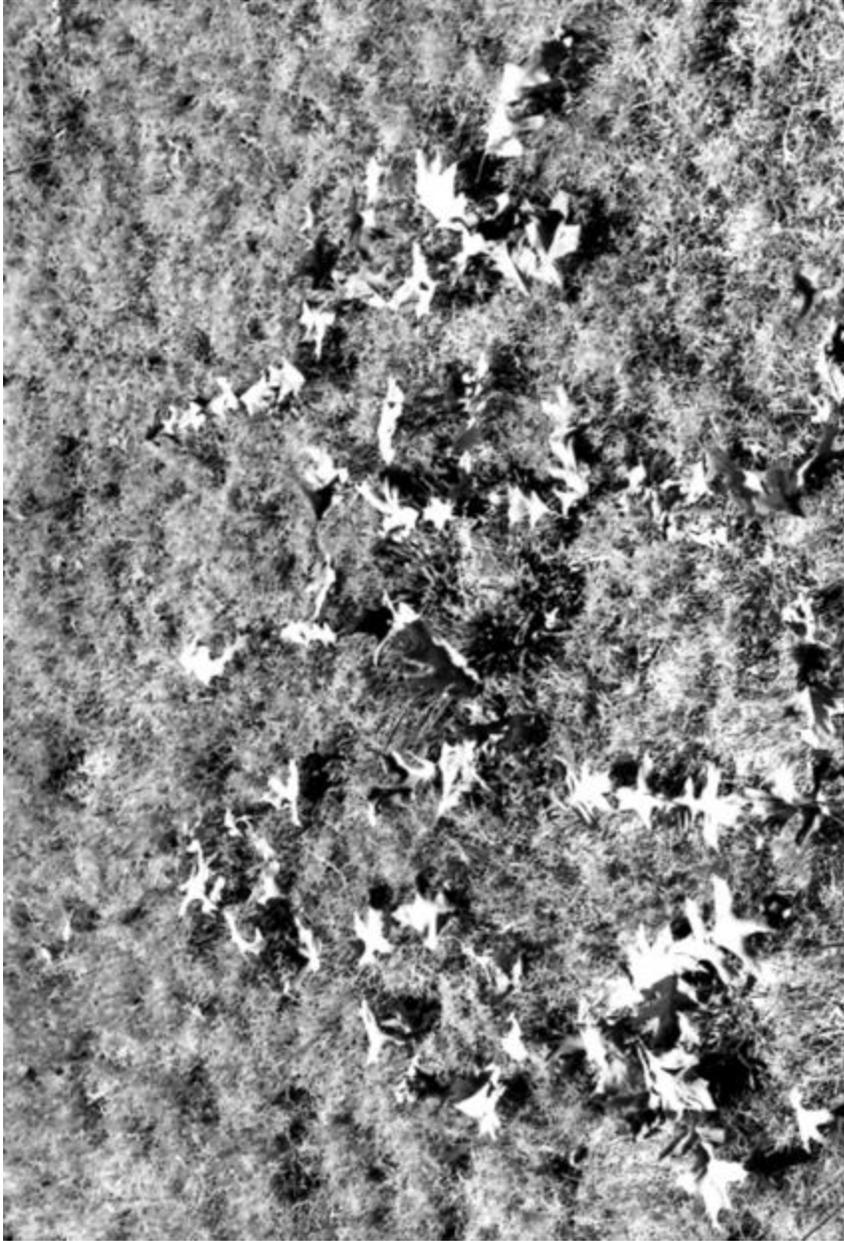
By the sundial, at the center of the garden, Laura explains the mystery of mysteries and posits four poems arising from the elements.





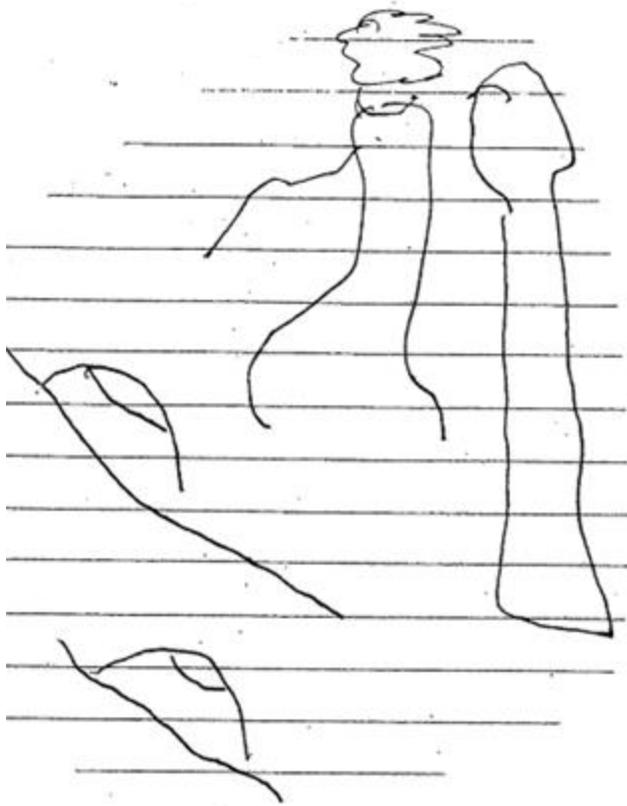


ALLER  
OVER  
ALL



## **CANTO 87**

Laura explains to Atuk how minds are eyes through which those in heaven peer into the hearts of mortals.



## CANTO 88

And Yahweh-Elohim planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground Yahweh-Elohim caused every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:8-9)

### *Atuk in his garden:*

“An all-powerful Deceiver may cause me to be in error, but no matter what the Deceiver may make me think, so long as I think at all, I know I’m thinking. This is a little different than the conclusion Descartes came to. Jumping from thinking to existing is a short distance in terms of intuition, but it’s a long way in terms of logic. At best, *I think, therefore I think.*”

For example, in Shakespeare's play, *Twelfth Night*, the Duke says,

Doth fade that very hour, to die ever  
they to perfection grew.

Is this so? To make statements is to perform a certain act of speech. If I make a certain utterance in an appropriate way and under the right circumstances, it can be said that I made a true statement. The Duke makes the above statement about women. William Shakespeare wrote the lines. Writing poetry and making statements are not the same thing, and the question arises, can knowledge be derived from poetry? In poetry, written or spoken, one person is speaking to another, and it is assumed that *something* is being communicated. But what?

In activities of everyday life, I ask for information, which I hope will be useful. If poetry transfers knowledge of the world and discussions in the world transfer practical information, it follows that poetry transfers some practical information. Yet how much of my daily discourse is used to transfer practical information?

I tell a colleague a joke because he is someone I must recognize but from whom I wish to stay estranged. I discuss the rain with a friend, who can observe it as well as myself. I ask the cat if it is hungry. The practical information ascertained here is illusive. Mostly, I'm positing emotional states and attitudes.

The *something* transmitted, then, involves feelings, which are an integral aspect of the conveyed meaning. Just as I interpret the sound of the voice, the facial configurations, and other mannerisms when talking with someone, so poetry attempts this overall kind of communication."

At one extreme I can deny poetry deals with true ideas at all, that it only expresses states of emotion or realizations of states of being. That the poem merely attempts to translate some vivid sensation. Conversely, I might conceive of poetry as fusing meaning with emotion, that it is the art of composing "high sentiments in beautiful language."

The attempt to define poetry in terms of statements of meaning and realization of being is inadequate because a poem is no substitute for the real thing. And the attempt to define poetry as of value in helping the reader discover truth is that by this conception we are led to say that language is valuable apart from its relation to truth and that poetic effects are dependent upon themselves rather than on any use the poet makes of them.

It is the relationship between the elements that the poet creates which is important. That is, it is not that the Duke says something which is either *true* or *beautiful* that matters, but that his statement accurately indicates an attitude fitting to his situation.

Poetry gives knowledge of the relation of the self to the external world. We come to share the Duke's grief for his sister's death and his unrequited love for Olivia. This knowledge is not empirical because it is knowledge of the world considered, subjectively, in terms of values.

Experience considered in this manner is dramatic, since it involves a process which embodies the self's effort to arrive at meaning. Because poetry involves this knowledge of experience, its enjoyment is severely limited when it is thought to only consist of true statements.

The confusion of poetic statement with scientific statement is a constant source of error in trying to determine what poetry is communicating. The value of scientific statement is in its precision. Poetry is also a specialized language, but it addresses different kinds of material. Although a poem may give good advice, I still might ask if it is a good poem.

## CANTO 89

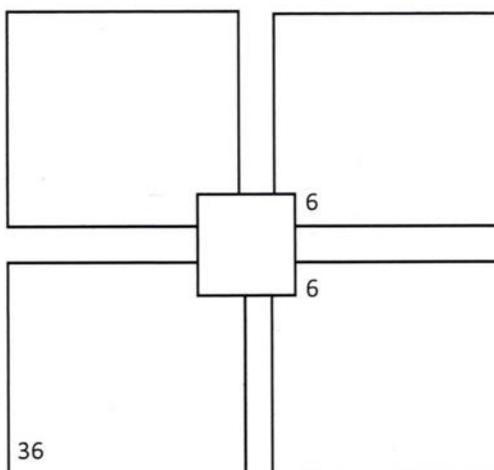
Adam, or 144, being the nucleus, the garden has enlarged to four squares of 36 X 36, or 1296 in area each, the numerical value of the *square yard British.*; or, again, each one is now *Jared*, or *Yard*, the source of decent.

—J. Ralston Skinner, *The Source of Measures*

Laura opened the book of measures, and the pages were made of gold and the letters of lapis lazuli. The book rose up by itself, tilted at a 45° angle, and a tri-spoked Vajra of red light circled inside the hollow core of Laura's tongue. The consonants made sweet melody.

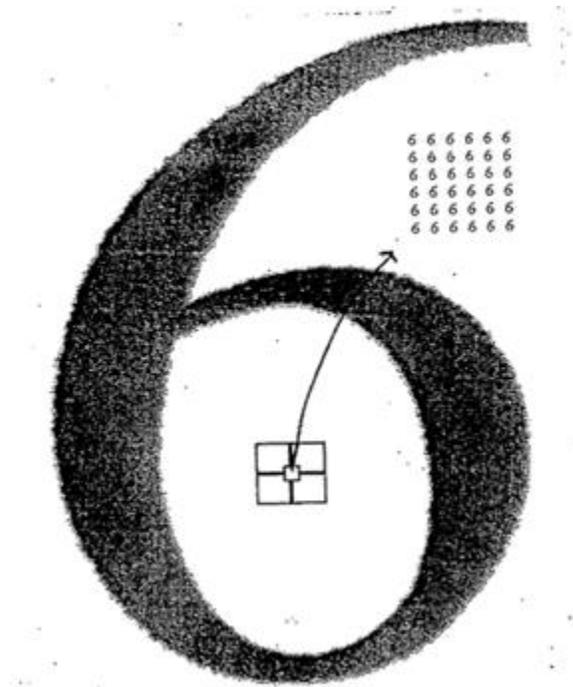
“My transmission, Atuk, is: At first the Earth was made of arid earth, and then, of productive earth, Adam-h, *soil*, ready to germinate, and the number 6 emerges from this element. Following Skinner's method: *Take the word Gan-Oden, or Garden Eden, and add the letters 3 + 5 + 7 + 4 + 5 = 24: the numerical value is 24, and to show the factor 6, this becomes 24 divided by 4 = 6, or the 24 indicates four parts, of 6 each. Cross 12, or a line of 12, on itself, and there results the sign of the letter or tau, whose sign value is 4, and whose valence is +.*

*Complete the square on each factor of 6, and there results the completed square of  $12 \times 12 = 144$ , composed of four small squares of  $6 \times 6$ , or 36 each. This is the nucleus form of the garden.”*



## CANTO 90

Laura guides Atuk along a white and green checkered path that curves down a slope, and along the edge of an oval-shaped yard, toward a small garden with a sun dial in the middle of a flowerbed where time and distance mingle.



To be reborn, one must identify with the eternal forms nature produces,  
*Wherein is darkly writ this truth profound: In its reflected glory*  
*we have new life.* —Goethe

Whereas Atuk, our Faustian Fool,  
had been on the verge  
of committing suicide,  
    thinking it a way to leave  
        behind a stale existence,  
he is now ready to transform the poisons of his personal life.

The memory of this past  
    vanishes like the winds of winter as he ventures forth.

## **CANTO 91**

**W**hen he reached the coast, Atuk learned that a recommendation from Hung Chow was the kiss of death. Atuk's luck had been tainted merely by mentioning the man. He would need to tend to his garden. Do some Qigong to regain balance. The last time he had...but what did it matter? What was done was done. History. End of story.

A fresh gym suit, a run along the beach, and a brisk dip in the ocean. He ran below the high cliffs near Aptos, past the remains of the cement ship built by Kaiser during World War II. Although the sea air, the spray, the slap of his feet on the sand was invigorating, he kept looking at the horizon, watching his castle crumbling. He needed to take a leak. He looked up and down the beach. In the distance, he could see a man

throwing a stick into the surf for his dog. So, he pissed in the surf. Better feeling, powerful, like filling up the sea with his pee. A wave cut in from behind him and got his legs wet. “God,” he prayed, “thank you for not making this the last frame.” The film might still be a go, no matter that Hung Chow was responsible for this fuck-up with the moneymen. Who in their right mind would bankroll a film about the life of the Hyronymous Bosch called *A Garden of Earthly Delights?*” Good question, but Hung Chow had got Atuk an invite to the Iraqi’s.

Catered party by a swimming pool, casual conversation. The host’s name was Ardavan—Ardy, for short—and he was second generation American, whose grandparents were from Iran, not Iraq. When Atuk mentioned Hung Chow, the guy coughed and spit his canapé into his gin and tonic. “That greed head,” Ardy said, “if there was a hole big enough to bury that fat bastard, I dump his lard ass into it.” Tears were welling in his eyes.

Atuk thought it best to best to change the subject. “What is not is not,” he stuttered, not sure exactly what he was saying. The lady next to him asked if she could freshen his drink, but he declined. Murmured, “I cry a lot more now, myself.”

Ardy regained his composure and took Atuk across the patio and into his study through a set of French doors. There was a large, elaborate glass sculpture in the room. The fingers of glass seemed to lick the shadows like flames. “It’s a Chahuli,” he said. “Hung Chow brokered the deal. Ten grand. A good price, but Hung Chow forgot to pay the artist, and I’m being sued.”

Atuk looked at the sculpture. “A beautiful piece of work.” “Yes, it is,” said Ardy, “and a beautiful mess, so you can see why don’t want to get into this *Garden* thing on the recommendation of Hung Chow.”

The sculpture started to sag. Atuk felt a void. He could see a man shaving, cutting himself with his razor, bumping his head on the cabinet door, knocking his glasses into the sink, one of the lenses falling out, the man sitting back on the toilet seat to fix his glasses, getting stuck, pulling the toilet off the floor, staggering out the front door of his house, being chased by a dog. "The same old shit," said Atuk, "but I can make this film without Hung Chow."

Atuk caught up with his roommate, Brent, in a local coffeehouse. Brent was working on his latest film script, *Cannibals*. He and Atuk had plans to drive into the Sierras and look for a small mining town as a setting for the story. "It's all working out," said Brent. "The story will center on the survivors of the Donner Party telling their stories to the townspeople when they return from their ordeal. Flashbacks. Different reactions. People horrified or fascinated or just curious. Macabre retellings of the original stories. A certain heroic cast to their survival. One very empirical-type character wants to know the minutest details, right down to the last, black cold cut. Sure, I'll need some historical stuff, but I've focused more on the psychological drama. Who was the first to die? Who first suggested cutting flesh from a body?"

"Grizzly," said Atuk.

"Sure. But what I see is this: their experience is like a crucible. Different for each survivor, a rite of passage into a strange land, an experience that is understandable under the circumstances but an experience that breaks the survivors apart from the rest of society."

"I've got something to tell you."

"Yeah, what's that?" asked Brent.

"I can't go with you to look for the town. I've been hired to work in the Bohemian Grove up north. I'm leaving first thing in the morning."

## CANTO 92

The black Model A coup pulled to a halt in front of Atuk. The window on the passenger side was open, and a man in overalls asked, "Need a ride?"

It was a warm, and Atuk needed to get to Monte Rio that day.

"Thanks," said Atuk, and opened the door. It had been a long time since he had ridden in an antique car. Come to think of it, he had never been in a car this old that moved. He remembered playing in an abandoned Ford of this vintage when he was a kid. He shuddered at the memory and was interrupted by the man in the driver's seat.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Atuk."

"Maurice, here. Got a destination?"

"As far as Monte Rio." Atuk had signed a non-disclosure statement and didn't want to let on too much.

"Kind of busy in that neck of the woods, this time of year," Maurice stated, flatly.

"I suppose so," replied Atuk, not sure where this was going.

Maurice asked, "Do you live around there?"

"No, I've got a job." Still closed mouth.

"Might you be heading for the Bohemian Grove, to the gathering?"

Had he guessed? Atuk wondered. "I'm right that this is a Model A. What year?"

"It's a '28. There's going to be an eclectic crowd there this year."

"I'm sorry, I'm not supposed to talk about this."

"I know. I know." Maurice was conciliatory. "But I work there, too."

"You do?" Atuk was surprised.

"I work there every summer. What will you be doing?"

"I've hired on as a valet," said Atuk, relaxing a bit. "What do you do there?"

“Well, I kind of do my own thing, but among things, I’m the stage manager of *The Cremation of Care*,” Maurice replied with a touch of pride.

“And that’s tomorrow night, right?” asked Atuk, “That’s the opening ceremony.”

“Right. There’s not that much to it, really. There’s a bonfire beneath a giant statue of an owl that symbolizes the release of care, and the Bohos will be welcomed and some of the staff introduced.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah, but the fire has to be laid, and the podium set up, and the P.A. system checked out. That’s where I’ve been. Replacing a speaker that’s out of commission.”

“I like your car,” Atuk said.

“Not completely restored, but close. Gets me to town and back.”

“You live here?” Atuk asked.

“Over in Graton. I own a bookstore and coffee-house, but I subsidize my income doing odd jobs. Like working at the Grove.”

“What’s the name of your bookstore?”

“It’s called Lost Coast.”

“I’ve been in there. You’ve got a great collection of used sci-fi. I hope this job doesn’t turn out to be like bad science fiction.”

“Well, you never know,” said Maurice, “From year to year the alchemy changes. This year William F. Buckley, some Grateful Dead band mates and the vintner Robert Mondavi are all scheduled to attend. Not all in the same camp, but with all the wine Mondavi donated, this *midsummer encampment*, as they call it, should be pretty mellow.”

Atuk smiled. “Right, but I’m sure some of these high rollers will still manage to get down to business.”

“Actually,” Maurice continued, “very little business takes place in the Bohemian Grove.”

“I thought all these captains of industry and government discuss business in secret there.”

Maurice clarified his statement. “Oh, I’m sure some deals are cut, but

the main focus of the affair is for everyone to relax from their worldly concerns. Get away from the pressure. Commiserate with each other over bad press. Originally, the club was formed in 1872 with the goal of connecting *gentlemen* to the pursuit of the arts, music, literature, that sort of thing. And that's still what it's about. The members wear togas, drink alcohol, smoke cigars, play some cards, and fraternize. Illicit drugs are forbidden, but there's always a little pot smoking. There is a motto: 'Weaving spiders come not here.'"

"I've heard other stories," said Atuk. "I've heard it's a sinister meeting place for the rich and powerful, and I've heard it called a silly summer camp for grown men."

"You might say it's some of both and a lot more in between," exclaimed Maurice.

They rattled along in Maurice's old car. Out the front window they could see the Russian River. Atuk noticed a mix of madrona and redwood trees along the highway, and he calculated the sun was approaching the two o'clock position. Maurice kept one eye on the rear view mirror because he was driving a little under the speed limit, wary lest faster cars tail gate him.

"What have you been doing before this?" asked Maurice.

"Lately, I've been working as an extra in films. But before that I kicked around. Did a stint as a cowhand, planted trees on Mount Saint Helens. Finally, I had enough of physical work, and I moved back to Nova Scotia. I have relatives in Halifax, and I decided to study Divinity there. I worked as a night watchman at an Inuit School, but I got into a relationship that didn't work out. Now, I'm here."

"I understand," said Maurice. "Which camp are you working at?"

"Mandalay."

"They'll keep you busy, there. That's the traditional seat of power in the grove. I think this year George Schultz and Colin Powell will be there."

"The Secretary of State?"

"Right, the present one and the former one. I even heard that former

president, Ronald Reagan appears on the list, despite the fact that he died last month. You never know, in the grove he might still make an appearance. Things can be spooky in there, even though at night lights illuminate all the camps.”

“What are the camps like?” asked Atuk.

“Oh, they vary. There are nine camps with fire rings. Some have a patio for lounging and listening to music. The more modern camps are like homes, with bars, kitchens, bathrooms, sleeping quarters. And others are more rustic. In the older camps, people sleep under canvas tents on wooden platforms.”

“I’ve heard the place is like a city unto itself,” said Atuk.

“You could say that. There are open-air trucks that shuttle people around twenty-four hours a day. There’s a library, a camp store, a museum, a barbershop, an emergency health clinic, even a fire station. My favorite building is still the old clubhouse designed by Maybeck.”

“Whose Maybeck?”

“Bernard Maybeck is legendary. He’s an architect who made very distinctive houses around the Bay Area after the Great Earthquake. A real craftsman. Made great use of materials. He’s been called ‘a Gothic man in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.’ In the early days, people like John Muir, who helped found the Sierra Club, and others, a lot of University of California faculty, who worshiped nature, would summer at the Bohemian Grove and write poetry extolling the life unspoiled by too much civilization. Maybeck loved the theatrical performances they staged in the grove. And these still go on. There are the Low Jinks and the High Jinks. Pretty wild stuff, some of it. Anyway, the clubhouse has a single floor and is about 20 feet off the ground on one side. The outside is shingled in big chunks of redwood bark, and the inside is paneled with redwood boards, so the overall effect is that you are on the inside of a redwood tree. You’re on a ridge, and the building sort of floats in the air like a tree house.”

“How big is the place?” Atuk scratched his head.

“The Grove covers about 3,000 acres and a couple thousand souls will

be there this year. Another important camp is called the Hill Billies. Donald Rumsfeld and our president, George Bush, are members of the Hill Billies, but I'm not sure if they'll attend this year. Not all the men who attend are rich and famous. Most are rich, but there are some guys that are just ordinary. On the other hand, some of the people working there are sort of famous. There's a porn star, Chad Savage. He's working there this year, as a valet."

"What's with the Grateful Dead showing up at an event like this?"

"I don't know. Mickey Hart lives nearby, in Occidental. He and Bob Weir are supposed to make the scene. They'll contribute a different vibe. Can you picture Micky Hart and Henry Kissenger rubbing shoulders?"

"Weird," said Atuk.

The old car was starting to overheat, and Maurice pulled into a turnout to let the engine cool. "Can't keep pushing her like I have been," he said. "Hard for her to keep to the speed limit on this road."

Atuk got out and stretched and gazed at the car. Lovely paint job. He looked closer. Nice pin striping, subtle. Maurice got out on his side, bringing a thermos with him. "Let's have a cup of tea in the shade. They moved off the gravel and sat on the ground in the shade under the branches of a big redwood. Maurice poured some tea into two cups. "Darjeeling with milk, that ok?"

They sipped their tea and relaxed in the buttery light of the afternoon. Finally, Maurice said, "None of my business, but you seem kind of stressed. Am I right?"

"I need some space; that's for sure," said Atuk.

"Problem with a married woman?"

"Wow, you're psychic."

"Maybe. Not. Just seemed likely, somehow," said Maurice.

"Oh, yeah? Well, it's true. I had an affair with a married woman. But it's not as if I stole anything."

"I'm not accusing you of anything," said Maurice, "but you must admit you did steal another man's wife."

"I suppose so, in a manner of speaking, but he had it coming. She was in agony living with that swine, and, besides, he fucks around, too," Atuk said in a self-congratulatory way, as though everyone had benefited from his licentiousness.

"I see," said Maurice, quietly.

"Like I said, I needed to get away. Her husband tried to kill me. He's a mean son-of-bitch."

"I see," said Maurice, softer still, and smiled. "What's her name?"

"Laura," said Atuk. "We met on the beach. At a party. She's the wife of a psychology professor who is a disciple of B.F. Skinner, you know, the behaviorist, and she had split from him because he wanted to raise their kid in a Skinner box."

"What exactly is that?"

"It's a totally controlled environment, temperature, humidity, rounded corners. He told her it was just an experiment for the first few formative months, but she would have none of it. And she split." Atuk looked into his cup for respite. "We started seeing one another. She liked dangerous sex." Atuk looked at Maurice. "Why am I telling you this?"

Maurice looked his most inscrutable and said, "Go on. Dangerous sex, you were saying."

"You know, not so much kinky, as risky. We had sex in the bushes at a park with people walking by. We had sex in an elevator between floors, and we both got off without anybody getting on, if you know what I mean."

Maurice smiled. "And where did this lead?" he asked.

"She went back to her old man because he promised not to warp their kid in the box. I should have let things be, but, no, I hooked up with her again. She was teaching a healing workshop on fire rituals. And I jumped back into the fire."

Maurice chuckled and misquoted Shakespeare, "Give me excess, so that I might burn up my appetite."

## CANTO 93

“Let my anguished soul fuse with the eternal regulations of nature,” prays Atuk. “The stars and moon reflect perfect order and fill the night with peace. Sure, there are black holes and death stars galore. Phenomena are impersonal, ordained, universal. Could be twenty dimensions in this universe, and five versions of each dimension. And in each version, there is at least one realm where humans are in anguish.”

Atuk views the horizon and is blinded by the broad sun. He stands amazed, remembering how often he has been rejected in love and routed in business. He has a strong desire to rekindle his life’s torch but is confounded by a sea of fire, a confusion of love and pain. He takes a swim, and a filmy vapor arises. This is good for his eyes, better than the infinite power of the sun. The rainbow is a truer symbol of his achievements, now clear, now dissolving into mist.

In the Court of the Bohemian Grove, precedence is the one serious subject in the lives of the Bohos, and it is the source of much grief and distress. The command *Weaving spiders come not here* may be posted at the entrance, but, regardless, the establishment is beset with intrigue. Not to be seen in The Bohemian Grove is to be condemned to obscurity. Not to be invited is to suffer ridicule and mimicry. It’s a feudal scene.

Around the fire rings, any and all subjects are discussed. Atuk overhears a discussion among doctors that ranges from the newest techniques in nuclear medicine to whether or not a comet presages disease. The risks of biological attack are hotly debated. There is laughter about a purgative soup which has worked on Rumsfield ten times in as many hours.

Atuk listens to a discussion of the tax code, which reveals the present code to have been designed to ensure the most favor for the rich and the least return to the government and its poorer citizens. He needs backing if he is to make his film. He intends to keep his mind open and his ears perked. He had caught the pun about the poor being miserable because they are the *base* of the social pyramid—well, he'd see about that.

For now, he's reassessing what he needs in a producer. With Hung Chow he knows both too much and too little to know the whole man. Half the time Hung Chow seems to be a pompous blunderer, a selfish man with little talent, and yet, he can rise to an occasion and be both confident and competent. Maybe he's just an actor, thinks Atuk. Hung Chow had gotten him the invite to the Iraqi's and now this job at the Bohemian Grove. This time, he would not mention Hung Chow's name.

While at work, Atuk's mind is elsewhere. He reflects, "Usually, when I'm confused, it's because my ideas are not based on personal experience, which, in turn, are not based on sense impressions and my reflection of those impressions. It's like I get disconnected from time and space and causality. I can't find any resemblance of my ideas to reality. Only by past experience can I guess what will come next, that the sun will rise tomorrow. I don't know this as a fact, but experience would suggest it might happen with some probability. But at best it's just a probability. Experience of the past is no proof of future events, for seemingly similar causes may in reality be different. What a fucking mess."

Atuk washes the wineglasses and gazes at the light filtering through the redwoods. "Just because I'm spiritual doesn't mean I not superstitious. Like I told Heinrich before he died, 'Carry some protection if you're going into the afterlife.' I believe in magic and mystery as well as logic. I know the attributes of the gods are extensions of my own consciousness, while I hope the prayers that I send into ten directions make my friend's path easier. I heard them in the second circle saying, 'Those yogis, what are they good for, sitting on their asses?' A butt is a

good thing. Good for attracting the opposite sex, good for defecating, good for resting on a chair, but whether you're standing, walking, sitting or lying down, a butt is usually not thought of as a spiritual tool. Well," thought Atuk, "I melt snow. This is my spiritual exercise. Freeze my ass off to make Spring come a little sooner."

Atuk puts the glasses away. "What is reality? These dudes seem to understand. Look at how they live. They have every material comfort. There was a time when I lived in a world with no confusion. When people said something, I took it at face value. As a kid I learned to understand the world by imitating adults. But now that I'm an adult, I wonder what's going on. It seems the world is entirely different from the words used to describe it. I hear these people talking to one another, and they seem to agree that the names they use to describe what they are talking about are attached to these things in such a way that the words do not change. It also seems that it is assumed that the object a word names is the meaning of the object, or at least it is the meaning of the mental image corresponding to the object perceived. And, finally, it is assumed that the meaning of a state of affairs corresponds to the relationship of the words in a sentence used to describe that state of affairs. Did there used to be phrases like *homeland security*, *information highway*, *collateral damage*? Everything seems to be in flux. I wish I could put it all behind me. I walk around. I hardly recognize people I know. Everything seems erased from my memory. Given my distress about the situation in the world, I don't know whom to blame. The terrorists? The politicians? The human condition? *Information highway*, how am I going to integrate this with my particular situation? Language like this is effective in conveying meaning only insofar as the language facilitates an understanding of the purposes implicit in the social context wherein it arises, to follow Wittgenstein's line of thinking. Although some of the words may be an image named by those words, to really understand what is going on, I have to look to the use of the language rather than the meaning. So, I conclude, part of my confused state of mind is due to my use of

language.”

Atuk has been in the Bohemian Grove for a week. Maurice has shown him the ropes. Although the sun is shining, Atuk shivers in an eternally cold shadows, which he knows are given off by the souls here. He is positive that his ancestors never lived under these trees. He keeps notes. “No point in placing blame on these heads. My dilemma is a problem of this moment and cannot be circumvented by a hypothetical rerouting of the sequence of events that led me to this dilemma. I came here thinking I might make a contact that would help me finance my movie, but it is as though I’m invisible, a non-entity, or, at most, a first name on a nametag. I understand this all too well.”

Atuk can see that it will require more than an analysis of the multifarious uses of language and its relationship to his Self to discover the support of who he is and to get what he wants. He can see the seams in the furniture cracking open. There are stains on the enamel that bleach will not remove. The foundations of the buildings are disintegrating. There is a fine dust that seems to erode everything. And this is true for his Self, too. He finds no help or support. He is free to be what he will be, and he recognizes himself in the freedom of his choices, but like a headless chicken, he finds his choices are absurd. “I just feel funny,” he says. “My consciousness alternates between pain and a feeling of being drugged. I shut my eyes. I fall asleep. I awake, and I experience an alarming widening of the world.”

It’s quite. The camp seems deserted. Some of the men have gone to a fly-casting demonstration George Schultz and Colin Powell are shooting skeet. A couple of Secret Service guys are keeping their ears erect for the slightest noise in the underbrush.

Atuk looks at the program. This year the Lakeside Talks include: “The Landscape of American Politics,” by David Brooks, a columnist for the New York Times; “College Athletics: Serious Business or Toy Department?” by Ted Leland, Stanford University’s athletic director;

“Flight,” by Chuck Yeager; “The Long War of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” by James Woolsey, a former CIA director; “The Coming Virtual Soldier,” by Roger McCarthy, principal and engineer of Exponent Inc.; and “Bohemia,” by author Herman Wouk. Atuk is interested in what Wouk has to say. It’s past 4:30, the time when the talks begin, but his work is done and he is free until dinner, so he walks down the path leading to the artificial lake where the Cremation of Care ceremony was held. Men in robes are seated on logs, listening to the white-haired novelist talk about Robert Louis Stevenson.

Wouk is telling about how Stevenson had sat in the Bohemian Club in San Francisco in his velvet coat, chain-smoking and reading. He was broke and unemployed and suffering from tuberculosis, when he met Fanny Osbourne. They fell head-over-heels and got married and settled near Mount Saint Helena, living rent-free in an abandoned mining shack, while he wrote *Treasure Island*.

Fanny Osbourne had married her demon lover. Stevenson could write undisturbed by any commotion. Fanny would check on him many times during the day. She made him dinners that went untouched. She might knock on the door to his room and no one answer. She knew he was there because she was sure she could hear him whispering and coughing and sometimes laughing. She found him magical, and he told her that the highest aesthetic was enchantment.

The light glistened on the lake. Atuk wished he had a demon lover, and as he turned back from the lake to look at the speaker, he noticed one of the waitresses. She was bent over, retrieving some wineglasses. “Now, there is backside that would melt some snow,” he thought, and he began to feel a little lightheaded. “A lewd thought,” he thought. “The magic of romance is in the intention. To ensnare this maid, I’ll need to be polite, be a friend, be a poet, even though *poet* is a four-letter word. I’ll need cunning, but I’ll need to keep decorum.”

He asked her name, and she said, “It’s Fanny.”

He smiled at the thought that he knew her name right when he saw her.

“All the women on my mother’s side, as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, are named Fanny, she continued.”

“It’s like that in my family on my father’s side,” said Atuk.

“What kind of name is Atuk?”

“It’s Inuit.”

“Are you an Eskimo?”

“No, Inuit. We’re related. Eskimos live in Alaska. The Inuit are in northern Canada. Actually, my family lives in Nova Scotia.”

“What are you doing here?” asked Fanny.

“I’ve lived in a lot of places. I went to school in Berkeley. How about you?”

“Born and raised in Camp Meeker. I’m a dryad.”

“What’s a dryad?”

“A tree nymph.”

“I see.” Atuk looked closely for fins or horns. She had wonderfully innocent eyes and a knowing smile.

“I can’t talk now. I’m supposed to be in the kitchen doing prep. I’ll be in the library tonight, after work.” She smiled her Cheshire smile.

“Ok, later,” he said.

“Atuk and Fanny.” He said this over a few times after she left. “Atuk and Fanny. Atuk and Fanny.” After a few repetitions it came out, “Afuk in Tanny.” He noticed she was quite bronze. A full-born beauty, a lady bright.

## **CANTO 94**

Atuk hurried to the library. There'd been cocktails, and he had served. Dinner invitations had been posted, and Mandalay was busier than usual. There was still summer light in the redwoods, and his cares had evaporated. He felt wonderful. In the shadows he spied Maurice sitting on a stump and he averted his eyes. Maurice had proved to be a trusty guide, but this night he was inspired by the spirit of folly.

Maurice is his Apollonian sage, a rational mind he's sure he can trust, but there had been a transformation of his values. "Now, I'm a stupid fool whose fallen in love. So much for truth. Give me beauty. Sensuous beauty. Let me be damned," he said to himself. He'd been taken over by her charms. He was willing to make the sacrifice of his freewill and solitude. Going slightly insane, he'd thrown cold philosophy out the window.

"What are you reading?" he asked her. She was sitting with her back to him, deep into a big book.

*"The Words of My Perfect Teacher."*

"How is it?"

"It's the sound of one hand clapping." She smiled. "Let's go for a walk." She put the book back on a shelf, and they walked out of the library and along a path that led towards the infirmary. It was much darker, now, and he couldn't see if Maurice is still in the shadows or not.

However, he could see how lovely Fanny was. He took her hand. She allowed her hand to remain in his. She was saying something about the Bodhisattva Path. "I want to walk that with you," he breathed, squeezing her hand. Had she squeezed him back? He felt that she had. But she was not silent for long.

"One takes a vow not to leave the cycle of life and death in future rebirths, even though one has the opportunity, and to return and help others overcome suffering until every sentient being attains Nirvana." How gorgeous her lips were! Lips, he suddenly realized, that he had kissed in previous lifetimes. "There are arguments," she was saying, "over whether there is a complete extinction of the mind stream."

She paused and took a sip of some bottled drink. Catching him looking at her, she offered her bottle to him. He was glad to accept, but after his first sip (which was more of a gulp) he choked, reeling back in his lawn chair in surprise. "My God, what is that stuff?" Fanny laughed. "You know how we Tantric Buddhists are. We drink a little poison at a feast? It's whiskey. I should have warned you. Now, there are the Buddhas of three realms, the naked Buddha and his consort, who exist and don't exist at the same time." Atuk laughed. In his mind, a naked Buddha with his consort kept appearing and disappearing. "I'm sorry, Fanny, but these Buddhas are so acrobatic."

"That's alright," she said, putting a hand on his arm. "There are Buddhas who may have had historical existence but, for now, emanate on the level of pure qualities. And there are the Buddhas of the relative world, perfected beings who presently exist in a historical context. The rest of us are in Samsara—"

"Jesus Christ, I told you not to call me here unless you'd shot and killed a motorist!" A little man with a portable phone was saying. "I don't need to hear you got another speeding ticket. You what? A drunk driving ticket? In one of these little towns? The officer's right there? Let me speak to him!"

Atuk and Fannie sat without speaking while he finished his conversation. Fannie was the first to speak. "It's...it's..." Atuk completed

her sentence, "The Shrub." The president strode past them to the staircase. "Stupid women," he was saying, "useless as political material." As the little man vanished, Fanny and then Atuk each took a sip from the bottle. And then, quite gently, as though they had been doing this together forever, they kissed. Atuk felt the bad vibes from the angry dwarf dissipate in the flood of elation he got from kissing Fanny. They parted and lay back. "What next?" Atuk said.

"Right," Fanny responded. She sounded, he thought, a bit tipsy. "Tara, is a Buddha; you are a Buddha; I am a Buddha. But this is a bit heady, and it may be easier to go back to the basics." She opened her arms and drew Atuk to her, so that he was half-ways lying on her. Their kisses became hotter, wetter—better. He said as much to Fanny, the beauty about to be his. "Hmm, there's so many 't's in your words," she laughed. "Are you just teasing me?"

"Oh no, Fanny, I'm falling in love with you. I want to touch you all over." He kissed her again. "Right here?" she asked, "In my secret place?"

"Where better?"

She stood up and slipped off her shorts. She was wearing no underwear. Her magnificent auburn bush approached his face. He nuzzled her, then started licking. Her clitoris, he noted, was swollen, and she caught her breath as he went on licking, kissing, and nuzzling. She reached down, and her hand he felt was delighted to grasp his cock. And then he was inside her, and words fail me.

When they came back from Nirvana, she whispered, "Let's sit in the yabyum position."

"How's that?" asked Atuk.

"Sit erect and cross your legs." Once he was sitting correctly, she lowered herself onto his moist organ. Facing him, she wrapped her legs around his waist. They were just getting comfortable when a sick-looking individual approached, walking with measured steps and cussing. It seemed he approved of what they were doing.

"That's the way," he said. "I'd offer to take over for you, but I've got to

find a doctor. I need medical help. Keep up the good work!" And he went up the steps into the infirmary.

Fanny began to giggle. "Why so mirthful, mouthful?" inquired Atuk.

"That Rumsfield, what a character! I don't agree with anything he says, the murderous bastard, but somehow. I like him." And they fell back to fucking, this way, then that, God bless them.

## **CANTO 95**

In the days to come, each one glowed with love, so that the distinguished guests were drawn to them, and they had to fend off some pretty bold approaches.

They spent their free time together, and they continued their conversation. Lying in Atuk's arms, she spoke, "You're right, why differentiate between Buddhahood, Christconsciousness, Union with the Divine, Tao, Atman-Bhraman, and so forth? Sure, there are differences, but the terms point to the same kind of awareness. The major difference between Buddhism and Christianity is in the Christian belief in a Creator god, something that philosophers drive themselves to the brink trying to prove. In the main, Buddhists just don't bother much with metaphysics. They cut to the chase by addressing suffering, and through meditation they try to discover their true face, or, if you can get around the idea of an individuated soul, finally, one's Buddha nature or one's soul is what it is, and it's not a matter of debate, only a matter of realization. This is what enlightenment means. Then, you get on with the day-to-day stuff. Nothing changes, really, only your view. I think it is easier to be a Buddhist and a Christian than it is to be a Christian and a Buddhist. The problem of the personal savior and no other god but the one is not so important in Buddhism. In Tantra,

there's a great deal of focus on the guru as a bringer of light."

Atuk, agrees, "This is exactly my point, that there is no need to differentiate. I think it's a matter of semantics and lump/label that in different religions the same entities and concepts have different names. I think the reason for me to be a Christian who does Buddhist practices and goes on with his day rather than a Buddhist who is a Christian who goes on with his day is this: as the Dalai Lama has stated, he does not encourage people to drop their current faith and embrace Tibetan Buddhism. He believes that there is a truth which is at the core of all faiths. I have a basic loyalty to Christ and don't dump an old friend when I've found an interesting new friend. The savior thing—yes, I suppose, but as a mystic Christian I live completely in God's grace. I have an ongoing connection with Christ consciousness through the Holy Spirit and don't really have any worries or concerns about sin or the hereafter etc. I don't really find it at all difficult."

"It shouldn't be," said Fanny. "They aren't in competition. Christ is with you when you do Tantric practice and when you're in a drum circle and when you call on the nature spirits. He should easily slide over from the driver's seat for Green Tara and sit in the back without complaint. He groks the whole Mother Goddess thing."

Atuk relaxed. "I'm looking closer at Tibetan Buddhism not because I'm a seeker per se, but because I've already found it and it's great and very helpful. And, I must say, you're great and very beautiful."

"Thank you," said Fanny, "and I would love to talk more, but I've got a lot to do in the kitchen. Go with?"

Atuk helps her on with her sweater, and they walk along the path toward the kitchen. Fanny and Atuk don't talk. Their hands brushed together, not much but just enough.

## CANTO 96

### Of A Night At The Movies:

“As you all know,” Hung Chow was saying, as I entered the room, a little out of breath from trying to find a parking place, “when young, I traveled extensively throughout America.” This was the first time he had mentioned this, and I for one had a hard time believing it. But what he had to tell us turned a small doubt into its opposite.

“When I was barely 21 years old, at an age, that is, when, had I been the child of an American millionaire, I should have been disporting myself at some more or less fashionable university, learning what was then considered appropriate—French Cubist Greek or Homeric Expressionism or Viennese prose-poetry or How to Run a Bank—some subject, anyway, that would qualify me as intelligent on tests designed by professors of esthetics, economics, or the classics—I found myself between two jobs, passing, for the first time in my life, through the city of Detroit.

The job I was leaving, psychiatric aide in a mental hospital (we changed bed sheets), had paid \$180 a month. Today, that would be about \$880, and I had most of my final check still on my person, so I was in no immediate danger of arrest for vagrancy.

However, as is often the case in that unsteady post-industrial oligopoly, I didn't know where my next check was coming from, so, when I alighted from the Greyhound bus and noticed an all-night movie theater, to which the admission was only one dollar, I decided that I would pay my dollar, choose a seat toward the rear, and go to sleep.

How often we fret over problems that go away of themselves! This was to prove just such a case: my next job was already waiting for me, had I but known, at the Homegrip Finance Corporation's office in Windsor, Ontario. For \$200 a month, I would be entering homes and saying: ‘That's a nice TV, Mrs. Lesource, is it paid for? And how about that couch?’ to distraught housewives who didn't know that in only 2% of all cases does HGF actually repossess. No, and I didn't know, when I

purchased the mandatory hat, that it would come off, as I was flung down some stairs one afternoon by a man in a T-shirt who was to come growling out of an inner room when Mrs. Lesource, who had assured me that Mr. Lesource was not at home, began to weep as I recited my lines.

No, and I didn't know that the job I would have after I had quit HGF because of that, was to be as a door-to-door salesman peddling magazines at \$5.50 commission per \$29.95 contract."

Here I must interpose that these revelations concerning our revered Master's youthful doings were distressing me considerably. Door-to-door salesman!—what next? By the time I had collected myself enough to attend to his words, I was horrified to hear him saying: "I shot her a dark, passionate glance. She thrilled as the hem of my trench coat brushed against the naked nylon of her leg. Would she sacrifice all for a few dizzying moments of risk beside the iridescent sea in the lean, suave embrace of the ship's captain?"

Actually, this last part mystified more than it horrified. But then Hung Chow went on: "That sort of writing is paid well; the system wishes to distract attention from itself, and that was the function of these magazines—that, and to bring news of products to the consumers. Part of the deal included a free dictionary that I priced at \$54.95 when I quit that company. The cost was entirely covered by the sale of advertisements! Our manager, Lonnie, told me to say to the housewife, 'You don't want your kids to grow up as ignorant as you are, do you?' He had me memorize this; when I repeated it before the other crewmembers, I realized they were laughing at something besides my accent. Lonnie was a barrel of laughs. What I actually had to say was, 'You want your children to have all the advantages you didn't, I'm sure.'

When Lonnie let me off on a block of tumbledown shanties, unkempt lawns littered with broken tricycles, and I demurred, and he with vehemence said to me, 'Well, Hung, you know why I'm giving you this territory? You know why these people don't have a pot to piss in? You know why they have all these kids? It's because they can't say No, that's why!' I confess that I appreciated the crude artfulness of his reasoning, and believed him. He was the better salesman.

But all that was the future. Meanwhile, I had installed myself in a warm, dry movie theater, sheltered from the midnight rain. I settled back into my seat and prepared to sleep. After the manner of the young, I did this by day-dreaming: here was the millionaire's daughter half-crazed with love of me; here was the million-dollar invention I couldn't quite see behind the stacks of hundred dollar bills on my inventor's table; here was the estate in California with its swimming pool in the shape of Marilyn Monroe...I had been in North America for some time already. Soon I was asleep and really dreaming. I was really dreaming I was being shaken violently: I wasn't dreaming, I really was being shaken violently, by a young man about my own age who now shone a flashlight in my face and said, 'Hey, buddy, you can't sleep in here.'

I could not believe my ears. Nor, when I looked around, my eyes. These, by now able to penetrate the smoky gloom, aided by the light reflected from the huge screen, brought me depressing information concerning the caliber of person with as sharp an eye for a deal as myself. Many of them had brown paper bags, which they raised to their lips; all were men; most were unshaven. And passing among them, up and down the aisles, were other young men with flashlights. The advantage we had thought to take of this deal had been anticipated. Whoever slept, was shaken.

But at what cost? What could be the turnover, at 3 a.m.? Would those of us too bored to watch the movie for the second or third time, go out into the street, and if so, was there really a line of men out there impatient to occupy our seats? What made it worth the management's while to keep all these young men in uniform and on active service?"

Hung Chow paused at this point; he did this for effect, but a new member of our group, supposing the question required him to come up with an answer, called out: "A city ordinance?"

Hung Chow regarded him steadily for a few seconds and then said, "Yes. But non-compliance with that ordinance was possible, I saw; an usher passed by every twenty minutes or so; a night's sleep could be pieced together, quarter-hour by quarter-hour, given persistence in humiliating amounts. And in between, one had the screen to watch: one had to watch the screen.

I began to watch the screen. It was a John Wayne movie. Or, I think, two. Because sometimes when I woke up he was wearing a cavalry uniform, and other times, a cowboy uniform; and sometimes he was killing Mexicans, and sometimes he was killing Indians.

Of course,” Hung Chow said, with that concern that we should understand things American as precisely as he did, “he was not really killing them, and they were not really Mexican or Indian; merely actors who looked less American than John Wayne. And as for death, there was more real death in the alley behind the theater, which was one consideration kept us in there.

My children,” Hung Chow addressed us with uncommon earnestness, “do not let you go as America went! All my ministry is this. I entertain you with a narrative. How neatly one piece fits into the piece that went before! The repetition of elements allows a sense of security. You are conducted to strange worlds fabulously furnished without any advance payment. You are reminded of something. You are supplied with a big picture to look at: a patio by night, a beachscape, the Alamo, for that was the name of the movie theater in Detroit. I encode a message for you to decipher; the culture has always rewarded you for succeeding in this activity. You feel superior, accomplished. But nothing has changed.

It is easier to see through my little tales than it is to see through the pernicious society we are trapped within. But the difference is merely scale.”

A gong sounded from deep inside the dwelling, and Hung Chow, after the briefest of pauses, said: “And speaking of that, the brownie of Death is already in us. Our consciences are encased in helmets of words. We are somewhere between sleep and waking, some of us,” (and here he pointed a finger at Kai El, the renowned film critic) “so stupefied that we consider seriously, in the name of the people, pabulum as art; and when our masters wake us, it is only to make us witness their mendacity. We feel guilty for the furniture we cannot afford. It is ours, already, all of it, ours! When will we toss them down the steps so that their hats come off, preferably with their heads still inside? My children, there are so many of us, so very few of them! What do you have to say for yourselves?”

## CANTO 97

“Empty, empty, empty, I’m so tired of empty. Give me something I can get my teeth into,” said Hung Chow. The old sage was sitting in a white plastic chair in his garden beside a rose bush. “Spirit plus meditation equals music,” he continued. “You must sing the emptiness of the eternal mind, the emptiness of the inspired mind, the emptiness of eternity, the emptiness of inspiration, the emptiness of boredom, the emptiness of satisfaction and the emptiness of dissatisfaction.” He raised his cup of tea and spilled the contents on the ground. “Now full, and now empty.”

There was a green and white checkered path in the garden that led to a round flowerbed with a sundial in the middle. I thought of William Blake’s admonishment for us to see eternity in the flower and the world in a grain of sand.

Hung Chow continued, “Experience the emptiness of the sensory world, of the intermediary world, of the world of the spirits, of the invisible world. Now empty, now full.”

I looked into the middle ground, neither focusing on Hung Chow nor on the flowers in the garden. I let the sunshine cleans me.

“Be empty in your heart. Be empty in your spirit. Be empty in the mystery. Be empty in the mystery of the mystery. And now, be full in your innermost depths.”

I felt at peace.

“You are empty on your path. You are empty in your path. Empty with your path. Empty towards your path. Remove the world. Remove the space to reveal the emptiness of this mojo garden.”

I began to dissolve.

Hung Chow put his hand on my knee. “You’ve got to have gumption to

ignore the fatal flaw, the fateful flow of the empty journey.”

## CANTO 98

Coming home, hot and irritable  
from a long day at the office,  
I park on the wrong side of street  
because it's close to my garden,  
and the four 'o' clocks have closed.

Walking on the checkered path,  
I mingle with the ghosts.  
My good suit on, my hair slicked down,  
I'm totally freaked.  
I'm going to turn to magic.

Not going to look at my stuff.  
Bogus, that's me.  
“Bag off,” I say.  
Where I live, in the suburbs,  
everybody's shit's the same color.

The wind chimes by my window chime,  
and in my dream I am a fireman, so  
I scramble out of bed & jump into my gear.  
I'm sure there's a conspiracy to change  
the color of the grass. It's the middle  
of the night, and I go outside to piss.  
Hypnotized by the Big Dipper,

I pee on my shoe.

I hear the sound of a bird that sounds like  
a bird imitating a seagull. I can't see this bird  
because it's hidden by dense leaves,  
but I'm sure if I saw it, it would be big.

Big enough to carry me across the continent.  
Terrific and inexhaustible.  
Charged with the energy of a Death Star.  
I stand on my front porch  
awaiting obliteration.

Left no footprints.  
No reflection.  
No rustle.  
No point in searching.

## **CANTO 99**

“I'd rather not have an opiumnated  
version of an exotic place  
          unheard by maidens or  
          forlorn of bodybuilders  
nor a gay walk along the boardwalk  
& certainly not a skirmish in Bhagdad.

Want to avoid such mistakes  
that's why I'm here

motoring up River Syntax.

How far does the river go?"

Been there & back—  
and I've got the love handles to prove it.

In zaNAdu  
did Burnette G. Haskell  
a stately pleasure bone decree

“I've lost my mind, but that's ok,  
I'm a Dharma student.”

Up ahead, in the future, I'm planting seeds of radical enlightenment  
purposing that Burnette G. Haskell  
1857-1907  
was exceedingly impatient.

The visionary Haskell  
took over the editorship of *Truth*  
& told his friends to arm themselves  
to the teeth.

Well, we are 179 pages into the poem  
and still no man  
f/ Potlock.

I'm listening to this Cuban band playing  
0073 0073  
whew,  
0073

There's a dozen bush tits in the trees  
at the edge of the garden,

& me w/ out my binoculars.

O, Fuck, Bushies: Go Home!

## CANTO 100

*No knowledge properly understood can deprive us of the mirth of flowers.*

—EDWARD DAHLBERG

Bromige and Denner meet in a beautiful garden in full bloom on a warm midsummer's day. Most of the flowers have blossomed, and the first fruits have started to ripen.

“How have you been?” Denner asks, “Writing stories?”

“Yes,” replies Bromige, “writing stories and inhaling gardens.”

“There are many beautiful gardens in Sonoma County,” says Denner, “I’ve been to several, and you’ve been to several, and we’ve been to the same, some.”

“Like that day with Bob and Sue,” says Bromige.

Denner smiles. “To the tiered garden that Jim built to represent a Sufi heaven.”

“But there was something unresolved around that garden,” says Bromige. “The neighbors had complaints. Made him jump through a lot of hoops before he could get a permit.”

“Yes,” says Denner, “people can be blockheads. The Tree of Death is at the center of their emotional gardens. People curl their lips with contempt, when all you did was piss on the presents at the party. And all because you got excited. And then they have contempt because they thought you had contempt, which was not very friendly, and everyone should really have kissed and made up, but instead it ends with fear and hostility among strangers, when it could so easily be turned around.”

“And I hope it could be the same with death,” says Bromige. “I would hope I could welcome death, after my usual loss of temper. I know from experience some people can be obstacles and some can be helpful. When I lived in Vancouver, British Columbia, I worked in the purchasing office of the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR), a no future job, although better than some, and I met a man who was of great help in changing my direction in life. The man’s name was Robert Foot, a very pleasant man—he’d read a lot of the same books I’d read—and we spent our lunch hours talking. One day, he said, ‘You really should go to University.’ And I said, ‘No, I don’t have the money.’ And he said, ‘These days, if you want to go to school to be a schoolteacher, they’ll give you money.’ At this I pricked up my ears, and in a few days, I looked up the registrar and signed up for an education program, It was amazing. My whole life changed. I was still crazy, of course, but now I had a future.”

“That’s it,” says Denner. “One minute you’re in a desert, and the next you’re in a garden. And all of us together, making up the flowers.”





We all have to tend our gardens.  
—Voltaire