

Trevanian's

THE
Crazyladies
OF
PEARL STREET



Cybernotes Companion

This document and many other items from the desk of Trevanian can be found at:
<http://www.trevanian.com>

The Crazyladies of Pearl Street Cybernotes Companion
By Trevanian

copyright©2005Trevanian All rights reserved No portion of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without permission and acquiring it in whatever form does not give any rights whatsoever to the acquirer over it.

ISBN 0-9544831-1-1

Published by:

Gravity Publishing, 5 Oldfield Road, London W3 7TD, England

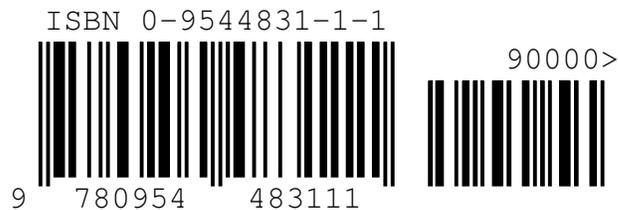
European Offices at:

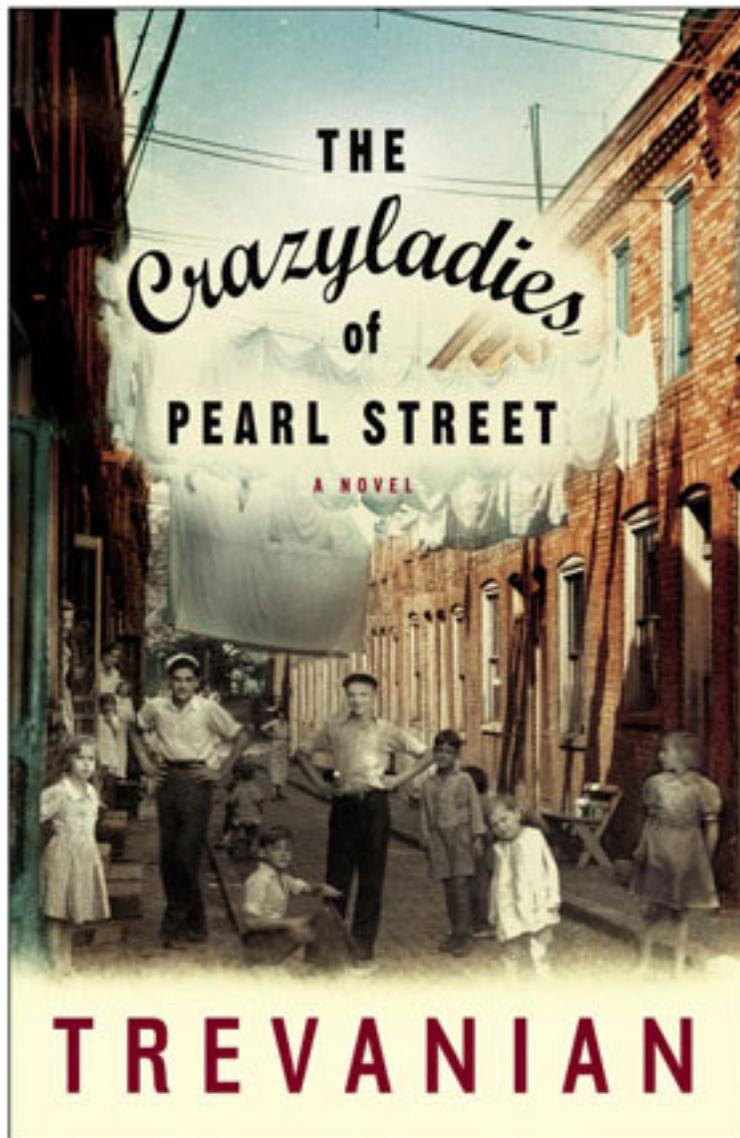
Calle Goles 48, bajo, A, Seville 41002, Spain

www.gravitypublishing.co.uk

The Crazyladies of Pearl Steet Cybernotes Companion is an internet paperback resource available from www.trevanian.com and is provided on the condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise be re-sold hired out lent copied stored reproduced transmitted or transferred in any other format form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the transferee.

Disclaimer: All internet site addresses and all document links to external content not under the control of the author or publisher and placed in this document are provided in good faith but neither the author nor publisher is responsible for any of the web site or document contents indicated by them.





Letter to the reader

Dear Reader,

Some of these cybernotes are fuller treatments of things touched upon *en passant* in the novel; others are comments about how things were, how they are, and, occasionally, how they should be. There are also a few cranky jeremiads from an old man looking back ruefully.

I am assured by people who claim to know about such things that something like ninety-five percent of the readers will not so much as glance into these notes. Fine, they'll be for that quirky slice of humanity that has always contained my favorite readers...the Others.

Print these notes and keep them with your copy of the book.

Trevanian

About these cybernotes

Each numbered note below corresponds to its cybernote number in the published book. Beside each cybernote heading is the page number in **Crown's first edition** of the book in which the reference appears. The reader can thus go from the novel to the notes and from the notes to the novel.

The contents list is also live and the reader can jump directly to any note mentioned. These cybernotes may also contain live links to pages at trevanian.com and to other web sites where songs, radio shows and things from the era can be found.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Letter to the reader..... | 3 |
| About these cybernotes..... | 3 |
| Contents..... | 4 |
| The Green Cake (page 1)..... | 7 |
| 1. ‘...was Bog Irish’ (p.5)..... | 7 |
| 2. ‘...in a bar brawl’ (p. 13)..... | 8 |
| 3. ‘...that I was an Indian too’ (p. 24)..... | 9 |
| Settling In (page 29)..... | 10 |
| 4. ‘...half of the next day’ (p. 40)..... | 10 |
| Miss Cox (page 45)..... | 10 |
| 5. ‘...educational system work’ (p. 55)..... | 10 |
| 6. ‘...ever taken an IQ test’ (p. 55)..... | 12 |
| 7. ‘...IQ would be 50’ (p. 58)..... | 13 |
| \$7.27 a Week (page 63)..... | 14 |
| 8. ‘...with a dose of salts.’ (p. 68)..... | 14 |
| 9. ‘...into the shadows of history’ (p. 72)..... | 14 |
| 10. ‘...you needed rest and escape’ (p. 74)..... | 15 |
| 11. ‘...Aldrich’s bad boy’ (p. 76)..... | 16 |
| Pearl Street Blues (page 79)..... | 16 |
| 12. ‘...beginning with the letter...’ (p. 80)..... | 16 |
| 13. ‘...battalions of young Americans’ (p. 92)..... | 18 |
| 14. ‘...gather power to himself.’ (p. 98)..... | 19 |
| 15. ‘...approval was sought’ (p. 101)..... | 20 |
| 16. ‘...a very yankee village’ (p. 102)..... | 21 |
| 17. ‘...and badly-farmed’ (p. 103)..... | 22 |
| Mrs McGivney’s Nickel (page 127)..... | 22 |
| 18. ‘...he’d do for me’ (p. 128)..... | 22 |
| 19. ‘...give the nickel to me’ (p. 131)..... | 23 |
| 20. ‘...flint against steel’ (p. 138)..... | 24 |
| 21. ‘...but you forgot just one thing...’ (p. 164)..... | 25 |
| Night Thoughts (Page 173)..... | 26 |
| 22. ‘...never to be seen again.’ (p. 174)..... | 26 |
| 23. ‘...never fully understand’ (p. 174)..... | 27 |
| 24. ‘...the Marx Brothers are the most over-rated.’ (p. 189)..... | 28 |
| 25. ‘...tons and tons of ‘acting’ (p. 189)..... | 28 |
| 26. ‘...fleeing what?’ (p. 195)..... | 31 |
| 27. ‘...totally useless Maginot line’ (p. 199)..... | 31 |
| 28. ‘...Vichy as its capitol’ (p. 199)..... | 32 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 29. ‘...swarming in behind them’ (p. 199) | 32 |
| 30. ‘...I was, of course, wrong’ (p. 202) | 33 |
| Love on Pearl Street (page 203) | 34 |
| 31. ‘...in comparison to children of today’ (p. 206) | 34 |
| 32. ‘...the ardent alchemy of Brigid Meehan’s left breast’ (p. 210) | 35 |
| 33. ‘...for fear of missing the resolution.’ (p.213) | 36 |
| 34. ‘...distinguish the one from the other’ (p. 213) | 37 |
| 35. ‘...well-intentioned myth’ (p. 214) | 39 |
| 36. ‘...as much as it impressed her’ (p.217) | 40 |
| 37. ‘...personal experience of the positive power of prayer’ (p .222)..... | 43 |
| 38. ‘...whispered into the darkness’ (p. 227) | 43 |
| A Cowboy Called Ben (page 233)..... | 44 |
| 39. ‘...would do four months later’ (p. 239) | 44 |
| 40. ‘...and chilling, too.’ (p. 239) | 44 |
| 41. ‘...I enjoyed privileged access’ (p. 246) | 45 |
| 42. ‘...electrical things that didn’t work’ (p. 248) | 49 |
| 43. ‘...The Ink Spots’ (p. 254) | 49 |
| North Pearl Street Goes to War (page 269)..... | 50 |
| 44. ‘...Monday, December 8’ (p. 274) | 50 |
| 45. ‘...out-shout the competition’ (p. 275) | 50 |
| 46. ‘...substitute for whipped cream’ (p. 276) | 52 |
| 47. ‘...withstand the power of...?’ (p. 276) | 52 |
| 48. ‘...the last year of peace’ (p. 282) | 53 |
| 49. ‘...was out of pocket.’ (p. 286) | 53 |
| 50. ‘...H. V. Kaltenborn’ (p. 289) | 55 |
| 51. ‘...therefore praiseworthy...also spooky’ (p. 289) | 55 |
| 52. ‘...precise diction was a bad’un’ (p. 291) | 55 |
| 53. ‘...the audience cheers him on’ (p. 292) | 56 |
| 54. ‘...nobody owned a car.’ (p. 292) | 56 |
| 55. ‘...people with mental problems’ (p. 295) | 59 |
| 56. ‘...come back safe and well’ (p. 297) | 59 |
| 57. ‘...the Castle Walk’ (p. 298) | 59 |
| 58. ‘...the clapping, whistling audience’ (p. 298) | 60 |
| 59. ‘... hits of the 1941-42 season’ (p. 302) | 60 |
| 60. ‘...Frederick Remington’ (p. 308) | 60 |
| 62. ‘...thrown back into the sea’ (p. 315) | 61 |
| Victory in Europe (page 317)..... | 61 |
| 63. ‘...victory be far away?’ (p. 317) | 61 |
| 64. ‘...moments of escape and adventure were behind me’ (p. 320) | 62 |
| 65. ‘...just in case.’ (p. 320) | 63 |
| 66. ‘...hits of the last year of the war.’ (p. 324) | 63 |
| 67. ‘...hadn’t quite understood it’ (p. 328) | 64 |
| Our Ship Comes In (page 347)..... | 64 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 68. ‘...budding young socialist’ (p. 349) | 64 |
| 69. ‘...not yet fifty’ (p. 359)..... | 65 |
| 70. ‘...wouldn’t bruise our hipbones.’ (p. 364) | 65 |
| CODA..... | 67 |
| Novels by Trevanian..... | 68 |
| Short Story Collection | 68 |
| Comedies (as Nicholas Searle)..... | 68 |

The Green Cake (page 1)

1. '*...was Bog Irish*' (p.5)

...is one of those terms, like canuck or nigger, that one who shares the ethnic distinction can get away with using, but outsiders must use gingerly and sympathetically, if at all. But the fact is my new neighbors on Pearl Street were bog Irish...as boggy as it gets.

So who were and what are the bog Irish?

Despite the scowling mistrust with which the Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment greeted the flood of Celtic Catholics that were driven to America by the Potato Famine, despite our employment of Irish men as nameless and unremembered draft animals in the digging of our early canals and railroad beds, and despite the injustices and indignities to which they were subjected, most Irish blended thoroughly and quickly into the homogenizing American melting pot and by the third generation found their place among our entrepreneurs, bankers, lawyers, teachers, publishers and, above all, politicians, for they seem to possess innately the skills and vices of the professional politician...and car dealers, property developers, journalists, television evangelists, and junk bond merchants.

So most Irish arrivals were integrated smoothly into the American family where they succeeded both in finding opportunities and in making contributions, but a few didn't make it into the homogenizing mainstream and ended up trapped in the undertow of economic dependency where they remained generation after complaining generation, some dependent upon will-numbing welfare, others dependent upon the political machines of Boston, New York or Chicago where minimal education, minimal-effort sinecures in municipal jobs like the police force, the fire department, or those urban maintenance crews that require eleven men to fill in a pot hole: two Irishmen to watch, two to oversee the watchers, two to make a record of the project, two to keep bystanders at a distance, two to be those bystanders...and a Latino guy to fill in the hole.

The over-paid, under-worked metropolitan fiefdoms of the police and the fire-fighters (both of whom treat their jobs as inheritances to be passed on within their families) join the welfare dependent bog Irish to constitute the major support of the IRA terrorists, while most Irish-Americans, although revealing their Gaelic origins by waxing moistly sentimental at the mention of the old country, take the United States to be their home. If they had to choose, they would act to benefit the US, rather than Ireland.

Jewish-Americans have similar conflicting allegiances to work out, and I'm sure the heart-and-mind tug of war will require hard thinking and sinewy sleights of mind.

Two relatively new nations on the rim of Europe, but essentially outside of European history, both with conservative religion at their core, both centered in urban, northeastern America, both with great historical reasons to complain and vast native capacities for complaint, both producing difficult options for their Americans.

It was the integrated Irish majority that coined the term 'bog Irish'¹ to describe this minority from whom they sought to distinguish and distance themselves. When we arrived on North Pearl, the street had been a sump of dependency and rancor for nearly a century. Its people viewed welfare as a natural right, a merited compensation because they had somehow been 'left out' of the American scramble for material success. Their frustration

manifested itself in petty crime, jealous vandalism, and flashing rages of violence, mostly turned against their wives and children. So addicted were they to social dependency that it was impossible to pry them away from it. Having elevated their dole money to a natural right, when an opportunity for real work appeared, they were reasoning something like this:

“So, let’s see here. This job offers five dollars an hour for a forty hour week. That’s what?...two hundred a week? And I’d have to give up my welfare check of a hundred fifty each week. So I’d be making fifty dollars for forty hours of work, which would be about a buck an hour! Well, I’m damned if I’ll work for a buck an hour! What the hell do they think I am...a buck an hour! If any bastard behind some desk somewhere thinks that I...!”

Thus the dole-dependent vent their seething low-grade background fevers of resentment and rancor built up over generation after generation of public handouts that bred hopelessness, helplessness, sloth, and incompetence. They had come to view welfare as a natural right because they had somehow been ‘left out’ of the American scramble for material success, and their frustration manifests itself in petty crime, jealous vandalism, and flashing rages of violence, mostly turned against wives, neighbors, and their own children.

2. ‘...in a bar brawl’ (p. 13)

Today, the brick row of seven identical houses that included our apartment at 238 would be described by a real estate agent trying to flog re-gentrified property to a two-job yuppie couple as ‘...retaining many stylistic elements of Georgian urban domestic construction’.

In Albany, as in most northeastern American cities, little housing was specifically built for the poor until the social and aesthetic disasters of post-World War II ‘urban renewal’. Before then, the poor lived in rickety, jerry-built wooden tenements that soon fell victim to fire, neglect, vandalism and rot, or they took over houses abandoned by the middle class, who slipped away from old Albany-on-the-Wharfside into newer and more fashionable residential developments to the north and west,* leaving their once proud homes to be broken up into apartments by slum landlords who bought them on the cheap, maintained them minimally, and made nasty little fortunes from wave after wave of immigrants, first from Ireland, then from Mediterranean and Slavic Europe, then Blacks from the American south, and finally families from the Hispanic and Asian diasporas, all of whom in their turn crowded into the narrow, noisy, noisome streets, glad to find something they could afford.

*The less desirable districts were almost always in the south or east ends of town, and the ‘better’ neighborhoods of northeastern American cities were (and still are) usually the west side or the north end of town. The only exceptions to this rule are cities lying on the eastern bank of a river.

The reason for this tendency is neither mysterious nor arcane. In the eastern half of the United States, most rivers flow from north to south, or from west to east. Therefore, downstream is usually south, east, or southeast; and being downstream of a city was both unpleasant and insalubrious before modern sewage treatment.

3. *'...that I was an Indian too'* (p. 24)

About this word, Indian.

When referring to themselves, most Indians prefer 'Indian' to 'native American', a neologism inflicted on them by liberal thought-police. Although 'Indian' was an error made by Europeans who stumbled over the New World on their way elsewhere, it's what the North American Indian has called himself, in pride and in hurt, for longer than the two hundred years that the United States of America has existed.

More precisely, Indians say 'Indian' when referring to pre-European Americans in a general way. The word most tribes use to indicate their own people would translate as 'the people', or 'human beings' or 'mankind'. My own family were Onondagans of the Iroquois nation, and 'Iroquois' (a slap-dash French spelling of Indian sounds) would translate as 'the people'. This assumption that 'we are the people' is only natural because, before the arrival of the White, both tribal memory and daily experience put the tribe at the center of creation.

A few tribe names are descriptive (Nez Pierce, for example), and some were spitefully inflicted on tribes by their enemies or victims (Apache, for one), but if these names eventually gained common usage, it was because the vilified tribe wore the title with pride in the realization that they were strong and dreaded enough to have earned the stigma of opprobrium. (This phenomenon of the pejorative tag being worn proudly by those it was intended to disparage is fairly common: Impressionists, for example, or Rebs, or Yanks.)

There were also a few odd or silly, Euro-cultural names inflicted on tribes by the Whites (the noble Romans of the Seneca tribe, is a case in point), and occasionally the belittling names did not involve a warrior trait, as when Iroquois-speakers described their northern neighbors as raw-meat-eaters: Es-ki-mo.

It is the diehard Politically Correcter-than-thou that seeks to foist 'native American' on Indians. The only Indians who prefer 'native American' are those for whom being Indian is a profession: Indians doing hokum lecture tours through Britain, or Indian politicians, or Indian-culture con men who flog 'Indian healing', CD's of Indian flutes and Meditation Drums, and all the rest of the flimflam, to say nothing of those who seek excuses to get stoned on cactus and mushrooms behind the shield of 'native American religion'.

But most Indians are not self-seeking politicians, fakers, con men, god-hustlers or druggies, and they prefer to be called simply 'Indians', because race is not foremost in the Indian's view of his cultural setting. Like most people, Indians think of themselves primarily as members of a family and secondly in terms of their work and calling. Only thirdly would they describe themselves as members of a tribe. Fourthly, they are a part of the great, widely heterogeneous and culturally diverse migrant pattern of pre-Columbian people in North America that they call 'Indians'. And lastly they are Americans, or Canadians. Thus, my own grandfather was first the head of his branch of the LaPointe family, second a railroad man, third a half-blood Onondagan Iroquois, fifth an Indian, sixth a Canadian/American, and only seventh, if even that, a Catholic and a democrat.

An observation for which I offer no reason: I have never met a North American Indian who felt any fraternal propinquity to Central and South American Indians, despite the many parallels in pre-historic migration patterns, and similarities in mistreatment at the hands of the White invader with his firestick, his iron armor and his horse. Indians of the far north have more fellow feeling for Mongolian tribesmen in northeast Asia than with 'Indians' living in the jungles of Central America.

(See also [cybernote 69](#))

Settling In (page 29)

4. '*...half of the next day*' (p. 40)

When I was little and walking hand in hand with Mother, she would squeeze my hand three times every time we approached a street corner. When I asked, she told me it was a secret code for the words 'I love you', but later she confessed that it was also to alert me to the danger of traffic, because I was always deeply lost in daydreams. When my sister came along, Mother sent the same three-squeeze 'I love you' to her when they crossed streets.

Years later, I did the same thing with my children, but I never explained the secret 'I love you' message to them...until now, in this cybernote.

Miss Cox (page 45)

5. '*...educational system work*' (p. 55)

This chapter serves as a testimonial from one of Miss Cox's last students. Her devotion, zest and commitment was typical of those under-paid, self-sacrificing women...those lay saints who, for sixty years, made American elementary public education a notable success, even in the absence of national standards to mitigate the damage inflicted by narrow-minded proscriptive local boards of education.

During the golden age of American elementary education (1890s-1950) most of these women were trained, not in colleges or universities, but at normal schools where they learned to be effective teachers...not social workers, nor amateur psychologists, nor clever 'edu-biz' managers of personnel and budgets, nor inculcators of fashionable doctrines, nor promoters of religious dogma, but *teachers* whose students ended up with a store of those facts and methods that give them entry to our cultural inheritance: how to parse a sentence, the history of Europe, the principal agricultural products of the nations of the world, how to use a library, the ideals that guided and shaped America's development (and the errors and blind spots that sometimes perverted its course), how to do long division, how to conceive and construct an essay, who wrote *The House of Seven Gables*, who painted the Mona Lisa, who discovered the source of yellow fever...facts and methods, facts and methods, the rocks upon which an education is founded. They did this, rather than ask twelve-year-olds to express their personal interpretations of the

profundities hidden within the ‘deceptively simple’ lyrics of John Lennon. (Whose lyrics, by the way are not deceptively simple; they’re just simple.)

It would be unjust not to praise the handful of gifted, self-sacrificing educational saints who continue to work within the public education systems of America, despite the collapse of general standards, the lack of peer stimulation, the absence of appreciation and financial incentive, the conversion of most inner city schools into temporary holding tanks for the sullen illiterate, and the widespread practice of hiring cultural role models with sub-standard qualifications and advancing them as quickly as possible into administration.*

The quality of American mass education is unlikely to improve now that all the old normal schools, with their tight focus on teaching methods that help the child acquire basic facts and models, are gone, having been converted from first rate teacher colleges into third rate state universities. Worse yet, with a few glittering exceptions, the best and brightest of our young people are no longer attracted to the hard work, low pay, and modest social prestige associated with teaching.

I worked for some years at the richest of America’s state universities where admission standards were significantly higher than the national average, but even there a little over eighty percent of the students enrolled in the School of Education came from the bottom twenty percent of accepted students. This did not mean that there weren’t a few bright potential teachers, but it certainly indicated that the teaching profession was no longer receiving the best and the brightest. Instead teaching had become a last-ditch back-up profession for the least imaginative, least confident, least ambitious. This unpromising material was pressed into a teacher-like shape by batteries of jargon-riddled education courses then sent out to instruct the next generation of youngsters, the least imaginative and the dimmest of whom, in their turn, became teachers of the following generation...and thus we arrived at the current state of public education in America, where most students entering university often have only a vague idea of the grammar and syntax of the language they speak (and in which they think), and no idea at all of how to plan, research and write a paper, or defend a premise, or prove a logical assertion, or write a cogent sentence, to say nothing of their almost total ignorance of geography, foreign languages, art, history...indeed of any culture beyond the pre-chewed MacKulture they derive from narcotizing mass media designed to by-pass the brain and impact directly on the central nervous system. This step-by-step lowering of the average quality of those who enter teaching has brought us to a dilemma. To attract the kinds of people who might be able to bring elementary and secondary education in America back to the level that had been achieved by 1940 by the legions of high-minded, devoted, competent (and ruthlessly exploited) women who entered teaching because few other professional opportunities were open to them, we would have to entice a better level of university students with palpably higher wages and better working conditions than are on offer today, and this would mean vastly overpaying, for a time at least, the lees, culls and time-servers that currently constitute the majority of the teaching profession.

But one of our current social problems might help us solve another. It is difficult to find dignified work with job-security and decent health insurance and retirement

benefits in an era when corporate greed inflicts downsizing, piecework, and out-sourcing structures on its employees as a way of wringing the last drop of energy and talent out of them. Offering such enticements as job-security and decent health and retirement benefits might attract better graduates into teaching with only a modest increase in the current wages, if—admittedly a vast ‘if’—a new crop of strong, forward-looking educational administrators could return our schools to their educational function, rather than serving, as they now do, as baby-sitters cum policemen cum social workers cum ideological inculcators.

It is a constant embarrassment to Americans living abroad that, when it comes to cultural awareness, general knowledge, and the ability to express oneself cogently, American students, even intelligent ones and those from the ‘better’ colleges and universities (not always exclusive categories), are about two years behind their counterparts in England and France. And even the brightest of our graduates are shameless in their sloppy use of language, which they fill with clichés, jargon, pleonasms, inarticulate grunts, mispronunciations and that annoying *mélange* of vacant buzz terms and longer-than-necessary words used just that painful little bit wrongly that has come to be called NewConese: the language of the current Whitehouse front liners, save for the Secretary of State.

But the embarrassment caused by our visiting students is nothing compared to the humiliation of sitting with an educated English-speaking Frenchman listening to a speech being delivered by an American president, military leader, or head of a major corporation, and knowing that the fate of the world is in the hands of these blithely self-confident cultural illiterates.

Fortunately, a bright kid can be saved by meeting just one really good teacher. I don’t know how to save our bright teachers.

*Who can, do; who can’t do, teach; who can’t teach, administer; who can’t administer, consult; who can’t even consult, appear on television as ‘experts’ and ‘life-style gurus’.

6. ‘...ever taken an IQ test’ (p. 55)

In the ’30s the dominant pedagogical craze was the use of IQ tests to discover students of high ‘intelligence’ in slums and impoverished rural areas, where they were not expected. The kinds of ‘intelligence’ that were sought were the mechanical and nomenclatural facilities that were measured by Stanford-Binet-Terman IQ tests, which were developed from prototypes used by the French army during the First World War to separate recruits who might be capable of mastering the technological intricacies of modern warfare from those whose primary military value was the ability of their flesh to absorb bullets that might otherwise have hit more useful men. From the late ’20s and throughout the ’30s, locating and burnishing ‘intelligence’ among the poor was liberal middle-class America’s favorite gesture towards equal opportunity. It was something the do-gooder could accomplish without excessive effort and without actually coming into physical contact with nastiness, as it involved dealing only with the presentable few of the

disadvantaged who were lucky enough to have IQs that equipped them to make their way upstream against the current of capitalist privilege.

This missionary quest for poor kids with high IQs was even the theme of several popular tough-kids-in-the-city films of the era. Like today's besetting educational zealotry for exposing students to cultures outside the Greco-European canons of literature, art, philosophy, science, and technology; the 'Test and Measure' movement of the '30's was focused on 'disadvantaged' children. But unlike modern 'multi-cultural exposure', the IQ fad was essentially elitist in its focus. Multi-cultural education, on the more democratic hand, is not only non-elitist, it is anti-elitist, providing, as it does, culturally disadvantaged students with attractive role models by pointing out and honoring contributions (often, because of a long history of social and cultural injustice, relatively minor ones) made by non-European, non-male constituents of America's colorful and healthful ethno/cultural salad.*

It is assumed that the benefits and comforts derived by children of minority cultures being exposed to the relatively minor contributions of non-European/non-male figures in art, literature, science, politics, etc. over the past two centuries will compensate for the loss of concentration on those cultural figures and events that constitute the rich inheritance of all young people in the English-speaking stream of Western Culture, including most particularly African-Americans and Indians, who need access to classic models of thought and expression even more than do their European-American classmates.

For those condemned to becoming more familiar with Toni Morrison than with William Shakespeare, we must hope the social benefits derived from preferring the 'role model' to the 'Heroic Creator' will be as great as the cultural losses have already been. Surely a wiser approach would be to offer the highest models of achievement, method, style, and character, while explaining the historical injustices and cultural distortions that biased opportunity towards males of European descent.

* It has often been pointed out that 'salad', with its separate and discrete bits differing in color, texture, and taste, is a better metaphor for the American cultural mix than the monotonic soup of the 'melting pot' .

7. '*...IQ would be 50*' (p. 58)

You might well quip that an IQ of 50 would have qualified me to teach creationist science at a fundamentalist college. But people didn't think about fundamentalist colleges in 1937, twelve years after the Scopes trial in which Clarence Darrow defended a high school science teacher who had broken Tennessee law by exposing his students to a Darwinian view of creation that differed from the six-day sleight of hand version in Genesis.

The Thirties brought a fresh, mind-clearing wind of reason that began to ventilate American thinking, while blasts of ridicule from such men as H. L. Menkin drove the Snake-Handlers, the Creationists, the Flat-earthers, the glossolalists, the Doomsday Cultists and the Literalists back into their caves. No one living in the new dawn of social

realism of the Thirties could have imagined that these follies would re-surface in the 1970's to infiltrate the American cultural and political scene. Once again, the Shamans of Balderdash have risen from the slime of superstition to hiss their electoral threats into the ears of spineless legislators, and once again American children who have the misfortune to live in such states as Kansas (if reports in French newspapers of recent pro-creationist legislation are true) are having their minds befogged with creationist nonsense.*

I assume that the entire faculty of the University of Kansas turned in their resignations en masse. If they didn't, I am ashamed on their behalf.

*Intelligent Christians manage to deal with Genesis on the poetic, metaphoric level...rather than as low-grade journalism.

\$7.27 a Week (page 63)

8. *'...with a dose of salts.'* (p. 68)

It was some years before I learned that the figure of speech involved taking things that certain unreliable people said with 'a pinch of salt' not a 'dose of salts'. But one has to admit that there was a certain earthy aptness to my mother's muddled simile.

9. *'...into the shadows of history'* (p. 72)

Long before NBC established the first coast-to-coast radio network in 1926, popular music had become an important cultural element—some have claimed the most important element—coming as we did from such diverse cultural backgrounds, and scattered as we were across a vast continent. Even before the invention of the phonograph, Tin Pan Alley tunes spread through those ubiquitous music stores found in every town, selling not only instruments, but also sheet music from which families sang the newest hits together, grandfather and granddaughter enjoying the same songs. This began to change with the advent of ragtime and, later, swing, which established boundaries of music-vs.-noise that separated the generations, a chasm that the arrival of rock-'n'-roll transformed into 'a great gulf fix'd' between the generations, which is only now beginning to heal over, as the rock-'n'-roll generation approaches its sixties

In the early years of the popular 'hit', an individual song enjoyed a longer shelf life and broader catchments than they have today. Many of the tunes that we sang in our kitchen while Anne-Marie and I did the supper dishes had, in fact, been written before the First World War: such universal favorites as: 'My Gal Sal', 1905; 'Some of These Days', 1909, 'Alexander's Ragtime Band' and 'My Melancholy Baby', 1911, all of which were widely sung, whistled and hummed throughout the '30's, comfortably holding their own with the transitory top ten 'hits' played by Big Bands.

10. ‘...you needed rest and escape’ (p. 74)

It is difficult to explain to someone who has grown up under the anodyne influence of television how powerful and attractive radio was ([explore this theme here](#)). The scintillating golden age of radio lasted only about twenty-five years, from the late Twenties to the early Fifties, before the mind-numbing medium of television reduced radio to two functions: that of a mere envelope for popular music; and the ubiquitous call-in Talk Show in which the Lonely, the Loony, the Lost, and the Ludicrous share their ignorance, their complaints, their rages, and their desperate need to be listened to by somebody...anybody at all...even at the masochistic cost of being ridiculed by some wiseassed interlocutor. But during its relatively short twenty-five years of dominance, radio informed and illuminated America. The novelty and impact of hearing news *when it was happening* coming from *where it was happening* induced a level of concentration and deliberation on the part of the listeners that was hitherto unknown.

At the same time, radio broadcasters were experimenting with new modes and new methods. There were comedies in which the punch line was a sound effect (Fibber Magee’s closet or Jack Benny’s vault) and new kinds of drama in which sound not only carried the dialogue, but, through sound effects, established the locale and created the emotional ambiance for the play, like the innovative mystery dramas of Arch Oboler. (The sound effect of an unanswered telephone ringing and ringing was the effective punch ending of radio’s most impactful drama, ‘Sorry, Wrong Number’.)

Television programming, on the lesser hand, began with worn-out vaudeville hacks plus Hopalong Cassidy films; then, after a brief creative moment of live television drama, its economically in-built impulse towards mediocrity rapidly reduced it to predictable, formulaic situation comedies, cop shows, ‘celebrity’ panels featuring people who were famous for being on celebrity panels, and quiz programs for the meagerly-informed, finally descending to revolting voyeuristic orgies in which coprophagous afternoon viewers watch geek shows in which social rejects confess ghastly acts and attitudes in a pitiable desire to be on ‘nationwide television’ for three minutes, while the program’s ego-maniacal presenter baits and urges them to debase themselves yet further. Exploiting the lowest-common-denominator nature of television, the bottom-feeding slime merchants who present these shameless feasts of nastiness become rich and famous. Then some of them clean up their acts a little and re-launch themselves as social crusaders. Some have even become ego-bloated media mega-stars, telling their mindless viewers how to decorate their houses, how to dress, what to eat, how to ‘make contact with their inner selves’...even what books to read, for the love of God!

One activates and exercises a smaller area of one’s brain by watching television than by listening to dramatic or narrative radio, and much less than by reading. The simple fact is that television is culturally passive; it is a slave’s medium, an intellectual narcotic.

To be fair, television has natural medial advantages for the broadcast of some sporting events. But even here it has had the deleterious effect of showering obscene amounts of money on people whose only distinction is the ability to run fast or to strike a small ball with a stick of wood, or to cause a large ball to pass through a metal ring, soon

driving the sportsmanship out of sport and replacing it with the barbaric ambiance of the Roman amphitheater. Even more disastrously, it offers the phantom dream of basketball riches to inner city kids who should be studying to improve their lot in the real world that most of them will live in.

11. ‘...Aldrich’s bad boy’ (p. 76)

It was during this time that I first read Mark Twain, beginning with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (with whose complicated role-playing games and ability to con both adults and other kids I eagerly identified) then going on to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (with whose folksy language and gullible good-heartedness I did not). But my early encounter with Huckleberry Finn was not a total loss. Two summers later I tore the written-on pages out of a school notebook and, using the remaining clean pages, I began a book that improved on Twain’s efforts by doubling the adventures and dangers, deleting the tedious late-night talks between Huck and Jim about life and slavery and human frailty and all that obvious stuff, and inventing more con tricks for the Duke and the Dolphin. (I’ve always had a soft spot for con men, despite the troubling example of my father. Perhaps that is why, in my early twenties, I spent a couple of seasons traveling with carnivals.)

My book was set on Florida’s Saint Johns River. I assumed that since Huckleberry Finn is set on the south-flowing Mississippi, no one would think of accusing me of imitation because, uncommonly of American rivers, the Saint Johns flows north.

Alas, I forsook the career of Authorship after a couple of weeks the solitary drudgery associated with that low and lonely craft, but I’ve had to live with the possibility that I may have dealt American letters a serious blow by failing to finish *The Adventures of Blueberry Coogan*.

Pearl Street Blues (page 79)

12. ‘...beginning with the letter...’ (p. 80)

Among the time-killing devices I used to relieve the weight of monotony and tedium of the classroom on a silent winter afternoon was the production of that quintessential artifact of classroom doldrums, the Chewed Pencil.

Sculpting the well-chewed pencil requires time, know-how, attention to detail, and no small amount of native tooth-to-lip dexterity. You begin with the tasty cedar point which you bite delicately between your front teeth, carefully making a row of tooth prints up to where the yellow paint begins, then you rotate the pencil slightly and work your way back down, then back up, then back down, until the entire point is crushed and sodden. It takes considerable address and judgment to apply enough tooth pressure to crush the wood and extract the cedar taste without breaking the lead. The tapered tip expertly chewed, you put the painted hexagonal shaft into your mouth sideways and work your way up the shaft to the metal eraser housing, making double sets of tooth dents, top and bottom, with each squeaking bite; then you rotate the pencil to the next flat and bite your

way down to the point, then rotate it again and work your way back up to the metal barrel, until you have textured all six surfaces. Great control is necessary to keep the teeth from going in too deeply as you work your way from a nibbled place to an unnibbled one and back again.

The pleasures of the pencil sculptor are both tactile (breaking through the crust of glossy paint and crushing down the wood) and auditory (which no one but you can hear, because your head functions as a sounding board). There isn't much gustatory gratification; only the cedar point can claim to be truly tasty; but the painted yellow hexagonal shaft has an interesting, if not appetizing, flavor, and the flakes that fall into your mouth in the process leave what wine fanciers might term a long, faintly metallic finish. But, of course, pencil-chewing is not about flavors, it's an art of textures. After you have crushed all the flats, you will have created six high ridges at the angles of the hexagon. (I say 'high' although the ridges are raised only a fraction of a millimeter, but things in the mouth explored by the tongue seem huge, as anyone who has ever had a tooth chipped in a fight will recall.) Chewing these ridges down is easy if the pencil is long and you work on it sideways in your mouth, as you did for the flats. But if the pencil has been sharpened a few times and is shorter, you are tempted to crush down the ridges with your front teeth, introducing the pencil point first. Caution! Don't daydream too deeply, as you might stick the back of your throat with the point, and the resulting gag is almost sure to attract the teacher's attention. The point and shaft of the pencil now thoroughly chewed, you begin on the eraser, which breaks up into gritty bits that have to be dredged off the tongue by fingers that must then be surreptitiously wiped on a corduroy leg of your knickers.

When the wood of a pencil has been painstakingly and fastidiously chewed from end to end, the 'dessert' is to crush the metal eraser holder between your front teeth. Then you rotate it ninety degrees and crush it again, rotate and crush, rotate and crush until the metal work-hardens and crystallizes along the crease, then splits, forcing out just enough of what is left of the eraser that it can still be used, but the jagged edge of metal is so close to the paper that sooner or later you will rip a hole in it.

The thoroughly chewed pencil is a deformed thing: unpleasant to look upon and ghastly to touch...in short, a piece of modern sculpture. Having elevated a pencil to this æsthetic state, the artist is torn between throwing it away, a shameful waste of money, time, and talent, or continuing to use it despite its repellent feeling between the fingers. There is a tertium quid that I tried a few times: rolling a piece of paper around the pencil and binding it with a rubber band. The paper wrap diminishes the revolting feeling of the pencil, but it slips within the wrap unless you grip it very firmly, which tires your fingers until they are dented and aching. More often than not, I passed between the horns of this dilemma by sharpening the pencil often and with unnecessary pressure, thus using it up quickly and having to replace it with an fresh, un-bitten, and therefore seductively tempting, pencil.

And there, Honored Reader, you have the common pencil treated as Robbe-Grillet once treated a cafetière.

13. ‘...battalions of young Americans’ (p. 92)

The George Washington Battalion’s losses were so heavy that it had to be merged into the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, but there still weren’t enough Americans to fill the roster, so in the end the Abraham Lincoln Battalion contained three times as many Spaniards as Americans.

The most famous of the Americans was a college student and the son of a lumberjack, Robert Hale Merriman, who eventually became chief of staff of one of the International Brigades and died in action when he was only twenty-six years old. Robert Hale Merriman, a fugitive hero who quickly slipped back into the shadows of time. A name no longer remembered...except by you, honored reader, and if only for this fleeting moment.

After one of our talks out on his back steps Mr Kane gave me two biographies of his personal heroes in the struggle for social justice. One was a book about Thomas Payne, concentrating on the time after the American Revolution when he was involved in the French Revolution; the other was a biography of the compassionate and courageous John P. Altgeld, governor of Illinois during the brutal suppression of striking Pullman workers by vicious scabs armed with ax handles, Pinkerton thugs armed with narrow canvas bags loaded with buckshot (‘kidney busters’ or ‘Pinkerton pain bags’), and Chicago Police armed with guns. Altgeld’s efforts to protect the strikers from the foaming rage of the barons of industry cost him his career. I still have those books, and glancing through them the other day I noticed that they were published by the International Press with offices in London, Paris, and Moscow, the same company that, in the 1950s, printed good-quality editions of selected British and American literature for sale at unbelievably low prices to people on the Indian sub-continent who were eager to learn English, the language of success. In what was a subtle, inexpensive, and very effective propaganda ploy, these books provided impressionable young Third World readers with a grim view of capitalism as described by famous English and American writers: Dickens’ *Hard Times* for example, and Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, which were published without permission and without any royalties being paid because at that time the Soviet Union was not party to copyright conventions, its principles of mass ownership coinciding with that deeply ingrained disinclination to pay writers for their work that marks all publishers in all countries, throughout all ages.

In 1943, I lifted my library’s copy of Howard Fast’s new and splendidly biased biography, *Citizen Tom Payne* from one of the return trolleys parked temporarily in the little-used room that was my reading hide-away, and I kept it out of circulation for a month, reading it over and over. Throughout my youth and early manhood, the proto-socialist Payne and the crypto-socialist John Altgeld were my heroes in the struggle for social justice. And I admired Robert La Follette, a compassionate Republican from Wisconsin who was eventually obliged to turn away from a party dominated by the bosses, the rich, the privileged, and the railroads, and offer himself as presidential candidate on the Progressive ticket in 1924. He lost for want of support and organization, but he received almost five million votes.

Despite the tendency of Liberals to dissipate energy in rhetoric, to be self-congratulatory, and to sacrifice practical advantage on the altar of dogma, I have found them preferable to the political craftiness of the new Conservative establishment, which deifies profit, sanctifies enterprise, and is bent on ideological domination. It was a matter of choosing the less harmful of two corrupting political views. At least you can have dinner with a Liberal. He will be annoying, and his reasoning soft-centered, but he will not live, as his NeoCon opposite number does, in stew of hate, fear and envy that frequently manifests itself as religious fervor.

In contemporary two-party America there is not, alas, an effective national party for informed people of compassionate instincts; our only choice is between a party of the right, and a party of the extreme right. (see also cybernote 68)

14. ‘...gather power to himself.’ (p. 98)

In his dream of ‘enterprise socialism’, Mr Kane envisioned medical services being offered within a free enterprise system, with doctors, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies competing for customers on the grounds of service, quality, cost, and efficacy—a far cry from the way those three constituents of the Health Mafia now batten on the misery and illness of a nation that lacks the political courage to reduce their criminal overcharges to an acceptable level. In Mr Kane’s ideal world the national government would establish acceptable levels of competence and performance and would set reasonable limits on the costs of treatments, operations, fees, and medications and the profits to be made by them. The keystone to Mr Kane’s system of health provision was that the doctors, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies were paid so much a day while their client was well and healthy, and nothing when the client was ill, thus removing all incentives, even those that are denied or unrecognized, for carelessness, over-prescription, failure to concentrate on prevention rather than on cure, and intentional ignorance of alternative health systems. Mr Kane’s utopian system would focus on the client’s health, not on his illness.

When it came to responding to the basic human right to all the education one can fruitfully use, once again Mr Kane’s oxymoronic ‘enterprise socialism’ took the provision of services away from politics and politicians. The central government would pay for our education, but schools would no longer be under the control of local boards of education that are so easily infiltrated by proscriptive special interest, narrow-minded bias, and racial or cultural bigotry. A federal agency would set national goals for literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge, and it would establish standards for teacher training and for facilities. He envisioned networks of privately owned and operated schools that can prove they have with no affiliations to religion or cults. These schools would compete for the ‘school tickets’ the government issued through parents or, in some cases, through a court acting *in loco parentis*. In their eagerness to attract and keep the students’ valuable ‘school tickets’, these private schools would hire the best teachers they could find and pay them whatever was necessary to keep them, and they would develop the most attractive and efficient learning structures and ambiances possible. There would be

'higher trade schools' in medicine, law, architecture, business administration, engineering, etc., and there would be schools that specialized in training people for service work, selling, helping, repairing, etc. Other schools would offer artisan apprenticeships, and others would teach technological and industrial methods, and yet others that concentrated on a liberal education, offering that broad education in the arts, history, and culture that is necessary for an informed citizen in a democracy. It would be from stellar students in this field that the future's teachers would come.

There would be ancillary services that sought to discover and measure the strengths, aptitudes, personal tastes and aspirations of individual students. And there would be special structures for gifted children and for those to whom learning did not come easily. Both of these groups would receive 'school tickets' of higher value, because they both need more intensive, more personal teaching. Mr Kane's eyes glittered behind this steel-rimmed glasses as he described the educational utopia he had once hoped would replace American assembly-line public education in which over-worked, under-paid, often mediocre and uninspired teachers push unmotivated students from grade to grade then dump them out into the world with a level of knowledge, taste, and skill that is the laughing stock of the developed world.

He realized that there were special problems in rural areas, where students were thinly spread and opportunities for choice and competition would be limited, and for these he had a very modern solution. Short-wave buff that he was, he envisioned electronic schools that combined recorded lectures with live discussions by amateur radio. There would be additional information through the post, and personal visits by traveling specialist teachers. Three or four large radio education companies would compete for students across the nation. What educational marvels might Mr Kane have constructed had he envisioned interactive television*, email, and computer technology?

Alas, Mr Kane's quixotic brand of utopian socialism was founded on the unreliable belief that homo sapiens is, at heart, a compassionate species.

*He might have envisioned at least the television teaching aid, because as early as 1931, the year the Empire State Building was built, there were almost 30,000 television receivers in the country, 9,000 of these in New York City alone. The Second World War delayed the development of television for five years.

15. '*...approval was sought*' (p. 101)

The first Negroes to appear on Pearl Street's run-down north end, were two families of a type we would now call socially mobile: men with jobs, well-spoken women, clean, neatly-dressed kids. They were representative of the natural leaders who used to live within the Black communities and serve as cultural leavening in the bad old days before the advent of civil rights.

In 1948, I made my first, and embarrassingly ineffective, public speech on the Seattle docks, where I harangued a handful of off-work, stevedores who remained majestically indifferent as I passionately denounced the unjust hiring practices that excluded Blacks from working on the docks.

. Like most socialists working for civil rights in the 'Fifties I assumed that after we had buried the laws and practices that had produced the inner city ghetto, many gifted Blacks would choose to remain with their people as teachers, entrepreneurs and political leaders, at least until educational and cultural equality caught up with equality under the law. We (those of us who were Black as well as those who were White) blithely expected these escapees from the ghettos to sacrifice, or at least to limit, their personal success and that of their children for the good of their people. I cannot now imagine why we assumed that the Black American bourgeoisie would be morally superior to the White American bourgeoisie which had, generation after generation and in one ethnic group after another, abandoned the less gifted, the less motivated, the less lucky of their racial brothers and fled the slums to join in the Great Money Scramble. It is not possible to blame the modern Blacks who have escaped with their children from the violence and hopelessness of the ghetto, but it remains true that in important ways the Black slums of the 'Thirties and 'Forties were better places to bring up children than are the ghettos of today, because they contained the merchants, the entrepreneurs, the artists, the preachers; the gifted, and the hard-working; the natural mentors, minders and models; the men and women whose departure from the ghettos impoverished the social scene.

Hard working and well behaved though they were, those first two Black families that were the social pioneers to advance their frontier onto Pearl Street were feared and resented, even by those who would have denied being racists. (After all, they openly admired the great boxing champion, Joe Louis, hadn't they? Calling him 'a credit to his race'?) These newcomers were resented because they had managed to find jobs when most of our men had not, and because of their relative cultural refinement, which we denigrated as 'uppitiness'; and they were feared because it was an element of received wisdom that if one Negro family got onto your block, the first thing you know the whole street would be Negro. Like they say: 'Give 'em an inch, and they'll take an ell.'

I wonder if anyone on Pearl Street knew what the hell an ell was?

Today, my block of North Pearl Street is totally Black, and has been for more than fifty years, according to the old man (a man of my age, that is) with whom I chatted during a visit to the United States, in 1987. We sat side by side on the front stoop of his house, which had been my house many years earlier, and we talked long and lazily about the past, about crazy things we had done as kids and the hot water we had gotten into, about how little of what they call 'progress' is worth a damn, and about how everything today seems to be going to hell in a handbasket...Hell, even the food doesn't taste as good as it used to. We talked as old men do.

16. *'...a very yankee village' (p. 102)*

Not long before her death from Alzheimer's disease in the 1980's, when 'Black' was enjoying its moment of political correctness before 'Afro-American', then 'African-American', became the nomenclatural obligation, my mother sharply corrected a man on a bus for using the word 'Black', instead of the more respectful 'Negro'. The man who had been guilty of this gaffe was Black, and he must have had an understanding nature,

because he simply nodded, showing no offense at being admonished by this nutty old honky.

17. *'...and badly-farmed' (p. 103)*

They soon wore out their thin, stony soil by over-planting and not being able to run enough livestock to replenish the earth with their droppings. The popular image of Indians as ecologically-aware guardians of Nature's bounty is a myth invented by White ad-men grinding out copy for anti-pollution campaigns. The pre-Columbian Indians' destructive slash-and-burn agriculture required them to move to fresh land every few years, and they hunted into extinction the horse, the mammoth, the giant elk...indeed, with the sole exception of the bison, all the large mammals they found when they crossed the Barring land bridge from Mongolia. And many Indians are still wasteful and insouciant hunters, as anyone knows who has observed the rapid decline of game stock wherever Indians hunt and fish with modern equipment and without restriction.

With the exception of hunting all large species of animals to extinction, except the bison, my Indian ancestors did little permanent ecological damage, not because they walked the land sensitively, but because they walked it infrequently and lightly, being relatively few in number, and lacking the technology to inflict on Nature the irreparable harm that hoards of Whites subsequently did, with their buffalo guns and combine harvesters, their overgrazing of the government-owned semi-arid high plateaus, their filth-spewing factories, their insistence on growing irrigated crops where Nature doesn't want crops, on washing their cars and flushing their toilets with drinking water, and on retiring to water-guzzling golf courses in deserts, with their leaky atomic waste storage, their rapacious fishing of cod of the Grand Banks to the point of extinction, their criminal drilling for oil in fragile permafrost tundra, their mindless use of pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers, genetically engineered crops, and all the rest of their greedy, lazy, short-sighted.....oh, to hell with them!

Mrs McGivney's Nickel (page 127)

18. *'...he'd do for me' (p. 128)*

At times of danger Britt Reid became the Green Hornet and rode around in a super-fast car that sounded like a loud hornet, but at other times he went through life as an ordinary person, his unique qualities and powers unrecognized by those around him...just like me. A couple of years later, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Kato, the Green Hornet's faithful Japanese valet became overnight his 'faithful Filipino valet'. I had briefly considered modeling myself on that wealthy young man-about-town, Lamont Cranston who, as the Shadow, clouded criminals' minds so that they could not see him. "Who knows what evil darkness lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows! (evil laugh)" The Shadow, who was brought to radio listeners in the northeast by Blue Coal, had learned occult powers of invisibility in the mysterious Orient, and that was a pretty

attractive idea: being invisible and able to stand right beside someone when he was doing something he shouldn't be doing, then suddenly laughing or speaking, and the person would just about piss himself with fright. I don't think there was a boy in America who didn't ponder the fact that if he had the Shadow's power of invisibility not only would he be able to thwart the forces of evil, but he could also sneak into the girls' dressing room at school and stand there in the corner...not touching or anything...just standing there. Wow. The closest I came to being the Shadow was to hide in the darkest corner of our hallway, and then suddenly laugh a deep scary laugh as my little sister and a playmate passed by. But they screamed and my sister went crying to my mother, so I gave up being Lamont Cranston

The Shadow's true identity was known only to 'his friend and companion, the lovely Margo Lane'. For a woman to go about in the company of a man as his 'companion' was pretty racy stuff in the 1930s. (I wonder if The Shadow's Margo Lane and Superman's Lois Lane were related? Those Lane girls get around.)

I also considered being the star of a comic book that had recently appeared on the news stands with a character called Batman, alias Bruce Wayne, who fought criminals (and later Nazis) with a lot of Bat-gadgets he confected in the basement laboratory of his fabulous mansion. And there was also Clark Kent, who passed for a mild-mannered reporter until the need to save someone obliged him to become Superman. But my talks with Mr Kane on his side steps had made a socialist of me, so I found it difficult to identify with someone who had come to Earth from another planet, or who was fabulously rich—a condition as farfetched on Pearl Street as being from another planet. In my view, the special strength and clever devices these heroes possessed gave them so much advantage over the forces of evil that all the challenge and fun was taken out of the contest. It was like characters who have magic powers. Dull. Like Harry Potter. I dismissed Superman with particular scorn on the grounds of basic physics. It was the way he flew through the air that outraged my understanding of gravity and the law of equal and opposite forces. If he had bounded from place to place by taking huge leaps with his super-strong legs, that would have been acceptable; but to jump up, then *turn in the air* and fly along. No. That flouted the laws of physics. Sorry, Superman. Next!

* You can explore these radio shows by [clicking here](#)

19. '*...give the nickel to me*' (p. 131)

The nickel was the standard unit of wealth for kids during the Depression: a real nickel, with an Indian on the face and a buffalo on the reverse. Back when a penny would send a postcard anywhere in the United States and a local telephone call cost a nickel (Hence, the wise-guy practice of snatching up a phone and saying, "It's your nickel, pal."), the usual tip a kid got for doing an errand was a nickel, which was what a bottle of pop (or soda, or tonic, depending on your part of the country) cost, as did any large candy bar, a comic book, a jam cruller, or a box of Cracker Jack (universally pronounced with a non-existent 's' on Jack). Cracker Jack not only offered a toy with its caramelized

popcorn and peanuts but it was my first dizzying encounter with the concept of infinity...in this case, with the infinitely small, because on the box there was a little boy in a sailor suit who held in his hand a box of Cracker Jack, on which there must be a boy holding a box of Cracker Jack, on which.... and my mind went skidding into infinity.

A single dip ice cream cone cost a nickel, and a double dip was a dime, but only an adult would be dumb enough to spend a dime on a double dip cone. Kids were canner; if they had a dime for ice cream, they would buy two nickel cones, thus getting an extra cone to eat for free.

Through the addictive gimmickry of word processing, I have discovered that the word 'nickel' appears fifty-two times in this book...evidence of the coin's erstwhile role as a kid's basic unit of wealth.

20. '*...flint against steel*' (p. 138)

Random thoughts about words:

The capacity of nouns or verbs, either as sounds or as letter arrangements in print, to transport things and actions from page to mind or from one mind to another is a wondrous thing; but nouns and verbs are petty parlor tricks compared to the preposition, that subtle indicator of relationships between and among words, simple relationships of space or time, as in 'behind' or 'after, and the more abstract and sophisticated relationships involved in 'of' or 'through'. Children just learning to speak use no prepositions because prepositions occupy an altogether higher plane of abstraction than do nouns and verbs.

Adjectives and adverbs can be addictive and dangerous; dangerous because teachers often praise and reward novelty and originality when what is needed is precision and economy, and addictive because the use of modifiers can become the lazy writer's crutch. The use of three or four modifiers to warp a weak word towards the intended meaning almost always signals that the writer didn't choose the best word in the first place. A small building intended for individual family residence is probably a 'house'; and a person who walks haltingly, painfully, jerkily is probably 'limping'.

A quality in words that particularly enthralled me was what I eventually came to call 'affective onomatopoeia'. Beyond onomatopoeia's simple echoing of the sounds things make, like 'splash', or 'growl', or 'crunch'; there are words the sounds of which evoke the basic character of the reality for which they stand: like 'quick', which starts and ends with a sharply cracking *k* and has a short *i* in the middle, or 'slow', with its chubby *ou* diphthong after a mushy *sl*, or 'ugly', with its repulsed '*ugh!*', or 'blowsy', in the very saying of which your cheeks and tongue become slack and untidy. It is hard to imagine a swifter word than 'swift', or a more lugubrious one than 'lugubrious'. Despite the example of 'lugubrious', English's affective onomatopoeia resides largely in its Anglo Saxon roots. Relatively few of our Latin-Norman words possess this ancillary quality of reinforcing tonality that I call affective onomatopoeia.

21. ‘...but you forgot just one thing...’ (p. 164)

We were sitting in our front room, listening to our radio in the dark, that October night in 1938 when the Orson Welles’ Mercury Players presented their adaptation of H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* * which they did in a novel ‘live newscast’ format, cutting in on a program of dance music to say they were interrupting this broadcast to announce that persistent rumors from New Jersey claimed that the world was under attack from Mars. A handful of people, who had tuned in late and therefore missed the opening declaration that the program was fiction, mistakenly thought they were listening to a real newscast of an invasion from Mars. (Some wag from New York City later said this misinterpretation was given credence by the fact that you’d have to be from Mars to imagine there was anything worth conquering in New Jersey.) Mr Welles (whose voice all kids recognized as the new Lamont Cranston, the Shadow, so no child could have been fooled) immediately saw a splendid opportunity for national publicity to help lift the slumping popularity of his Mercury Theater of the Air. The next morning he gave a news conference in which, his hair tousled as though from a sleepless night of worry, his face haggard with concern, he begged the press to believe that he had ‘...never intended to cause the wild panic that swept the entire eastern seaboard’, and thus he cleverly fed the reporters their headline and lead-in. It was a slack news period, so dozens of newspapers quoted almost verbatim Mr Welles’ colorful description of the havoc his broadcast had inadvertently wrought. In fact, relatively few people had been tuned to the Mercury Theater because it was opposite America’s most popular program of the era, “Charley McCarthy and Edgar Bergen”, which my family never listened to because...well, a ventriloquist on the *radio*? Come on!

The War of the Worlds broadcast had announced—both at the beginning and at the end—that it was a fiction, but Mr Welles’ public relations acumen still managed to give birth to one the most tenacious factoids in the folk history of the ‘Thirties. As with most self-generating, self-validating urban myths, the propagators of Men From Mars Panic Myth always claimed that a personal friend or close relative had witnessed the event...in this case, was one of those who had packed his wife and kids into the Model A and had rushed off in frenzied hysteria to escape into the hinterlands of New Jersey. You never met anyone who actually experienced this mass exodus at first hand, but as the tale passed from telling to telling, so did the teller’s ‘friend’ or ‘close relative’, so no matter how often the factoid was repeated or how far from truth the accumulating embellishments carried it, it remained as unimpeachable as its the teller’s relatives, and this eye-witness reportage gave it the weight of fact.

Many years later, I was working with the director/producer of Ed Murrow’s ground-breaking television interview program, Person to Person, and over dinner he mentioned that as a young production assistant he had worked on the famous Welles/Wells broadcast and had sat in on the ensuing press conference that Orson Welles had so deftly manipulated as to create ‘history’ out of whole cloth. I expressed my admiration of Welles’ quick thinking, and he agreed, but he said that, in fact, Welles’ reaction hadn’t been totally off the cuff. During a break in the final rehearsal of the program, someone had suggested that some of the audience might mistake the show for a

real news broadcast. Young Welles chuckled and said, “Good. We could use a little publicity!” (As indeed they could. Recall that Welles had recently taken the role of the Shadow..not a thing a successful actor/producer/director would do.)

Because Mr Welles’ melodramatic description of events his story was swallowed whole by dozens of representatives of the news-hungry press, the urban myth that the Men-from-Mars broadcast caused mass panic almost immediately developed the armor of verisimilitude that comes from seeming to have many sources, the various newspapers serving to verify one another. And to top things off, avid reporters managed to track down two or three of the pigeons who had actually panicked and fled, so there were a couple of days of follow-up interviews. Meanwhile, on the strength of this one episode, Mr Welles was able to go to Hollywood to make *Citizen Kane*.

Over the years, Mr Welles himself added to these mythogenic streams. When, in his later career, he was reduced to giving lectures and appearing on late night talk shows, doing hand magic and heavy-handed take-offs on himself, he often found an eager audience for his rambling tales of past glory...including the time he managed to frighten ‘half the eastern seaboard’. To this day, there are historians of the media who believe that half of the eastern seaboard was running wildly around in an effort to escape while the other half was cowering in their basements, crazed with fear of green-eyed monsters. Barnum was wrong when he said ‘there’s one born every minute’. There are thousands.

* You can explore the media mania induced by this broadcast here
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/%7E1930s/RADIO/WOTW/frames.html>

Night Thoughts (Page 173)

22. ‘...never to be seen again.’ (p. 174)

Time is not a constant. There are infinitely long minutes of embarrassment and brief minutes of praise; good years fly by, bad ones crawl. When I think back to my childhood on North Pearl Street I realize that the days were so crowded with incidents and sensations: games, worries, work, chores, new books, new ideas, that the weeks rushed by with never enough time for all I wanted to do. But if the days and weeks of my youth were short, the years seemed interminable. A year. A whole year! A massive chunk of frozen time that melted with glacial slowness. When I paused in my reading and looked back a year, I could hardly imagine that I had once believed *that* or hadn’t yet learned *this*. And if something was to happen a year in the future, it might as just well have be in the year 2000, or some other weird-sounding Flash Gordon date. A year! Time beyond the ability of a kid to envision, much less to wait for.

But now that I am old, the flux of time has reversed. Now it is the days that are long, and the years short. Viscous ninety-minute hours of survival routine crawl by, while the years flash past so quickly that something I think occurred last year or the year before turns out to have happened ten years ago. One morning you’re sixty and you think that maybe you’d better start doing those things you’d always meant to do, then you wake

up the next morning to find that you're seventy and it's too late. I suppose a stoic would set the short days and long years of youth against the long days and short years of old age and say that it all balances out in the long run...a stoic with a Jesuitical twist of mind, that is.

23. '*...never fully understand*' (p. 174)

When I came across the notion of the Big Bang I dropped it to this last group, but still the concept itched at the back of my mind. I couldn't help wondering: what was it that went bang? I didn't worry about when it went bang or where, because those questions were answered in the definition of Big Bang. (Well, not so much answered as made redundant because time and space were one, so where *was* when). But I did wonder what went bang, and how. (A philosopher would have wondered why.)

Over the years I followed the fads and fisticuffs of competing cosmological theories. An interesting avenue of hypothesis was opened when String Theory of the state of matter arrived to provide a more flexible way to conceive of matter and dimension than as discrete atomic bundles distributed in space and time. Strugglers at the edge of comprehension suggested that the 'strings' were flattened out into pulsating membranes of infinite variety and that they existed in ten dimensions. Finally (but, of course nothing is really final) M-Theory provided us with an eleventh dimension that accounted for the remarkable weakness of gravitational force and offered us the image of an infinite number of parallel universes produced by the intrusion of one membrane upon its neighbor, which explained 'what went bang' by pushing the dawn of matter and energy back to before our universe's Big Bang, which could have been but one in an infinite number of succeeding universes, each with its own big bang.

But still the questions linger...whence the membrane; and when the intrusion? Prime Cause falls back a couple of infinities, but remains intact and elusive.

I recently encountered another sur-logical phenomenon that I shall never fully understand. But this one is more human and personal, therefore more fun. It is an intriguing system of personal analysis designed to reveal elements of one's character and potential, and also to evaluate the likelihood of successful relationships with other people. It is called 'The Theory of Eight'.

In that its analyses and insights begin with the time and place of one's birth, 'The Theory of Eight' resembles astrology, and I was therefore prepared to dismiss it. But an old friend (and a lifelong debunker of the supernatural) described the insights offered by this Theory of Eight as '*...rich, subtle, and uncannily accurate*'. My friend went on to claim that the TO8 (she had already developed this chummy nickname) answered the two most vital questions in anyone's life:

What should I do next?

And with whom?

Chary though I am of all things extra-logical, my curiosity was piqued by her enthusiasm, so I looked in on the TO8 website (www.theoryofeight.com) and I provided

it with my birth date and place. The results were intriguing so, by way of a challenge, I posed an idle question about my life. What I discovered about myself was astonishingly, even uncomfortably accurate, although the tone in which the information was supplied was warm and compassionate, with a glow of humor. I had the feeling that someone had private access to my soul. Indeed, so accurate and insightful was it that I decided not to seek similar information about those close to me. I'd rather not know.

How does this Theory of Eight work? No idea. I am charmed by its philosophy of love and the purpose behind relationships. It's spookily insightful and could be of great help in understanding oneself, making critical decisions, or working out why you are having trouble with your boss, your lover, your children, so I pass it on.

24. '*...the Marx Brothers are the most over-rated.*' (p. 189)

Most knowledgeable buffs consider Laurel and Hardy's *Two Tars** to be the funniest film ever made. In fact, it's the funniest film and a half, the opening 'gum ball' sequence being a free-standing turn linked to the main 'car-destruction' sequence only by the girls that Stan and Ollie pick up in the city street and bring to the stalled line of traffic on the road. (Nothing in either story explained or necessitated their being sailors.)

*follow this link to the official Laurel and Hardy web site where you can find out more about this silent classic: [click here](#)

25. '*...tons and tons of 'acting'.*' (p. 189)

The brightest jewels of Thirties filmmaking were the fast-talking Screw-ball Comedies with their cocktails, white telephones and snappy comebacks. But these were beyond the life experience of people from the slums, and so weren't adequately appreciated by us.

Because of my mother's taste for her 'drama films', I sat through more 'women's movies' than a boy ought to be obliged to. I felt particularly hard done by the night we walked all the way up Clinton Avenue to see *Gone With the Wind* when it finally got to the neighborhood Paramount Theater about a year after its release. My mother and sister loved the film, but for a boy of ten it was a dreary, butt-numbing experience. Not only was it full of fancy dresses and women tapping men's chests with their fans, but it reneged on its advertising posters' promise of a little action, because there were only a few scenes of interesting war, and those consisted mostly of actors riding around in a buggy while someone flashed red lights on their faces to make you think Atlanta was burning down around them, or scenes of the heroine walking through smoldering piles of stuff while soldiers with dirty rags tied around their heads staggered by. And worse was to come! I suffered through what felt like six hours of this stuff and I was beginning to get an idea of what purgatory would be like, when the word 'Intermission' appeared on the screen and the lights came up in the theater, and everyone stood up and moved around, waiting, I assumed, for the redeeming second feature. In time, the lights came down and the screen brightened, but the second feature turned out to be not a second

feature at all, but just Part Two: Scarlet Staggers On, alternately sobbing and being brave for another nine or ten hours! Jeez! Give a guy a break!

Still, even if I found my mother's 'women's movies' stodgy and sloppy, this was Hollywood's golden age, when one season's output offered more memorable films than come onto our screens in a decade today. In case you suspect me of indulging in the tendency of the old to burnish the past, here is a menu of the 1939-40 season's filmic banquet, which you can compare with today's thin broth.

ABE LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS (1940) D: John Cromwell, DP: James Wong Howe, C: Raymond Massey.

ALL THIS AND HEAVEN TOO (1940) D: Anatole Litvak, DP: Ernest Hallder, C: Charles Boyer, Bette Davis.

BABES IN ARMS (1939) D: Busby Berkeley, Camera: Ray June, C: Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney.

THE BANK DICK (1940) D: Mahatma Kane Jeeves, DP: Milton Krasner, C: W. C. Fields.

BEAU GESTE (1939) D: William Wellman, DP: Theodor Sparkuhl and Archie Stout: C: Gary Cooper, Ray Milland.

DARK VICTORY (1939) D: Edmund Goulding, DP: Ernest Haller, C: Bette Davis, George Brent.

DESTRY RIDES AGAIN (1939) D: George Marshall, DP: Hal Mohr, C: James Stewart, Marlene Dietrich.

DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK (1939) D: John Ford, DP: Bert Glennon, C: Henry Fonda, Claudette Colbert.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT (1940) D: Alfred Hitchcock, DP: Rudolph Mate, C: Joel McCrea

GOLDEN BOY (1939) D: Ruben Mamoulian, DP: Nicholas Musuraca, Play by Clifford Odets, C: William Holden, Barbara Stanwick

THE GRAPES OF WRATH (1940) D: John Ford, DP: Gregg Toland, C: Henry Fonda, Jane Darwell, John Carradine.

THE GREAT DICTATOR (1940) D: Charles Chaplin, DP: Karl Struss and Rollie Totheroh.

GUNGA DIN (1939) D: George Stevens, DP Joseph H. August, C: Cary Grant, Victor McLaglen, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.

HIS GIRL FRIDAY (1940) D: Howard Hawks, DP: Joseph Walker, C: Rosalind Russell, Cary Grant.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1939) (First of the Rathbone/Bruce Sherlock Holmes Series.)

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME (1939) D: William Dieterle, DP: Joseph H. August, C: Charles Laughton.

IDIOT'S DELIGHT (1939) D: Clarence Brown, DP: William Daniels, W: Robert Sherwood (from his play), C: Clark Gable, Norma Sheare.

INTERMEZZO (1939) D: Gregory Ratoff, DP: Gregg Toland, P: David O. Selznick. C: Leslie Howard, Ingrid Bergman

IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD (1939) D: W. S. Van Dyke, DP: Oliver Marsh, C: James Stewart, Claudette Colbert.

JUAREZ (1939) D: John Huston, DP Tony Gaudio, C: Bette Davis, Brian Ahern, John Garfield.

KITTY FOYLE (1940) D: Sam Wood, DP: Robert De Grasse, C: Ginger Rogers.

LOVE AFFAIR (1939) D: Leo McCarey, DP: Rudolph Mate, Charles Boyer, Irene Dunne.

MR SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON (1939) D: Frank Capra, DP: Joseph Walker, C: James Stewart.

MY FAVORITE WIFE (1940) D: Frank Capra, DP: Joseph Walker, C: Cary Grant, Irene Dunne.

NINOTCHKA (1939) D: Ernst Lubisch, DP: William Daniels, C: Greta Garbo, Melvin Douglas.

NORTHWEST PASSAGE (1940) D: King Vidor, DP: Sidney Wagner and William V. Skall, C: Spencer Tracy.

OF MICE AND MEN (1939) D: Lewis Milestone, DP Norbert Brodine, C: Burgess Meredith, Lon Chaney, Jr.

OUR TOWN (1940) D: Sam Wood, DP: William Cameron Menzies, C: Frank Craven, Thomas Mitchell, Fay Bainter.

THE PHILADELPHIA STORY (1940) D: George Cukor, DP Joseph Ruttenberg, C: Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, James Stewart.

PINOCCHIO (140) Walt Disney.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (1940) D: Robert Z. Leonard, Writer (under alias) Aldos Huxley, DP: Karl Freund, C: Laurence Oliver, Greer Garson.

THE PRIVATE LIVES OF ELIZABETH AND ESSEX (1939) D: Michael Curtiz, DP Sol Polito, C: Bette Davis, Errol Flynn

THE RAINS CAME (1939) D: Clarence Brown, DP: Arthur Miller, C: Myrna Low, George Brent, Tyrone Power, Maria Ouspenskaya.

REBECCA (1940) D: Alfred Hitchcock, DP George Barnes, C: Laurence Olivier, Joan Fontain, Judith Anderson.

THE ROARING TWENTIES (1939) D: Raoul Walsh, DP Ernest Haller, C: James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart.

SATURDAY'S CHILDREN (1940) D: Vincent Sherman, DP James Wong Howe, C: John Garfield, Claud Rains, George Tobias.

STAGE COACH (1939) D: John Ford, C: John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Thomas Mitchell.

THEY DRIVE BY NIGHT (1940) D: Raoul Walsh, DP: Arthur Edeson, C: George Raft, Humphrey Bogart, Ann Sheridan, Ida Lupino.

THEY MADE ME A CRIMINAL (1939) D: Busby Berkeley, DP: James Wong Howe, C: John Garfield, Claude Rains.

UNION PACIFIC (1939) D: Cecil B. De Mille, DP: Victor Milner, C: Barbara Stanwyck, Joel McCrea, Akim Tamiroff.

THE WOMEN (1939) D: George Cukor, DP: Oliver T. Marsh, C (An all woman cast) Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell, Paulette Goddard, Joan Fontaine, Ruth Hussey, Margaret Dumont, Marjorie Main, Hedda Hopper.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS (1939) D: William Wyler, DP: Gregg Toland, C: Laurence Olivier, Merle Oberon, David Niven.

In addition to which, two from the same director...

GONE WITH THE WIND(1939) D: Victor Fleming (after Sam Wood and George Cukor) and special effects by Yakima Canute, DP: Ernest Haller and Ray Hennahan, C: Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Olivia de Havilland, Leslie Howard, Hattie McDaniel, Butterfly McQueen.

THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939) D: Victor Fleming, DP: Harold Rosson, C: Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, RayBolger, Jack Haley, Bert Lahr, Margaret Hamilton, Billie Burke.

(Save for the last two, I have listed these films alphabetically so as not to inflict my personal preferences on you.)

[see Trevanian's 100 best pre-1970 Films for English-Speaking audiences](#)

26. '*...fleeing what?*' (p. 195)

Standing alone on our stoop, looking back at those footprints already filling with snow, I was sure that this eloquent image full of mystical metaphor would be impressed on my consciousness forever. But it faded and slipped away, unremembered, unregretted. Until, some sixty years later, as I was writing about coming home that night from the movies through the snow, that moment returned to me, as fresh and as full of fraudulent significance as ever. Where do they hide, these forgotten moments? Why do they surface after sixty years of silent repose in the deepest folds of the brain, surface not only with the event intact to its most fragile detail, but with one's feelings about the moment as fresh and tender as ever? And how do they survive the total replacement of old brain cells by new that we are told occurs every few years?

27. '*...totally useless Maginot line*' (p. 199)

At about this time a strange, oddly comforting urban factoid swept the country. This grassfire urban myth described how Hitler had been taken into 'the snowy woods' by three Frenchmen, tied to a tree, and shot. I first heard this from the nun who taught history at Our Lady of Angels, and I was so relieved! There would be no war after all, nothing to prevent our ship from coming in. But I was bewildered when no comment about this remarkable event was made on that evening's news broadcast, and I mentioned this to the history nun. She said the government was probably keeping it quiet to protect

French citizens from Nazi reprisals, and that made sense...sort of. But it seemed to me that sooner or later the Nazis were likely to notice that Hitler wasn't showing up at his office any more, then what? A day passed, then a week, and still the radio was informing us that Hitler had done this, or had ordered that, and the rumor of his assassination in those snowy woods faded away, just sublimated into the mists of folk history.

Over the years, I have met lingering ghosts of this tale here and there across the nation. When I mention it, people often recall it with something like: 'Oh yes, I remember that. Gosh, I had almost forgotten. I wonder what really happened?' In some versions the brave assassins were Finns or Norwegians, rather than Frenchmen, and sometimes Hitler had been tied to a tree and bayoneted, rather than shot, but the details of his being taken 'out into the snowy woods by three men' remained remarkably consistent. Perhaps this had something to do with the numerological heft of the number three, and there may have been lingering cultural memories of druidic rites; or maybe there is just something memorable and satisfying about the visual image of three men and their prisoner disappearing into 'the snowy woods'. I suspect that some of my older readers will remember the brief respite from anxiety this comforting urban myth brought to them on the eve of war.

28. '*...Vichy as its capitol*' (p. 199)

I live in France, as you may know, and have for many years. And I can tell you that the issue of collaboration continues to trouble the Frenchman's self-esteem and haunt his self-image even today. Typically of the Gallic genius for defining uncomfortable truths out of existence, most establishment historians treat 'collaboration' and 'resistance' as relative positions on a continuum, suggesting that all the conquered countries resisted in some ways, and collaborated in others. This is not quite true. Of all the countries under Nazi domination, only one used its own national police and bureaucratic systems to identify, arrest, and transport Jews. Vichy France was that one. In contrast to Vichy France, Norway for example, managed to protect all their Jews. The Norwegian state police never found it possible to locate any Jews in their country in spite of the fury and threats of the German occupiers. (Isn't it always Norway? Norway and Canada...the international good guys. And at the opposite end of the continuum, there's Russia and the United States. I hate the company we're now keeping. I liked it better in the earlier days when we were the good guys. Sometimes politically immature and clumsy, often misunderstood, always envied...but down deep, the good guys. Now, like the Russians, we are the dangerous, grasping, bullying bad guys.)

29. '*...swarming in behind them*' (p. 199)

1940 Brought us songs like: I'll Never Smile Again, Imagination, Only Forever (which Ben and my mother took as 'their song'...but you haven't met Ben yet), Maybe, We Three, Careless, When You Wish Upon a Star, Fools Rush In, Ferryboat Serenade, The Breeze and I, With the Wind and the Rain in Your Hair, When the Swallows Come

Back to Capistrano, In the Mood, Blueberry Hill, A Nightingale Sang in Berkley Square, Where or When, How High the Moon, Bewitched, In an Old Dutch Garden, (...when it was June) On the Isle of May, Everything Happens to Me, I Could Write a Book. ([explore these here](#))

30. *'...I was, of course, wrong' (p. 202)*

Although girls mature socially earlier than boys, they enter the hormonal stage of puberty a little later, and much more gracefully. This isn't generally recognized because the earliest stage of a girl's passage into womanhood is recognized for what it is, while a boy's is not. In the northern hemisphere, girls are seldom younger than thirteen when they fall victim to those sudden blushes, those clumsy attempts at sophistication, that coltish gangliness, those nameless reveries, and that crippling self-consciousness that herald the physical changes that will soon explain all. Ex-tomboys giggle, ex-hoydens flush with unaccountable confusion, and there is a sudden desire to have a best friend to share secrets with. All in all, save for the discomfort of some of the physical changes and a lingering regret at the loss of easy-going, sexless childhood, the dawn of a girl's coltish passage into womanhood is a charming thing that knowing adults smile upon.

Not so with boys. Their reactions to the early trickles of testosterone that begin at the age of nine or ten, long before there is any change in voice, appearance of body hair, or distention of testicles to inform him of the cause of the madness that freezes his imagination, destroys his calm, shrinks his horizons and sours his temperament. First, he becomes insanely energetic and inflicts free-flowing aggression on everything that can be broken, shattered, twisted, climbed, mastered, threatened, bullied, buried, bent, burnt, bruised or busted. The observer of these raging aberrations would be hard pressed to recognize them as the dawn of sexual maturity. No awkward coltish grace here, no charming blushes, no sudden shyness; only bafflement and anger as the boy, still clinging to the rituals and rhythms of childhood, is dragged snarling and pouting into manhood, for which he is not ready and with which he cannot cope. It is little wonder that men revert to their interrupted childhoods as often as they can: going on hunting trips with the guys and all the other variants of playing 'guns' and 'cowboys -and-Indians', or converting their daily highway commute into a grand prix competition, or watching televised sports from a couch, masses of infantile high-calorie non-foods at hand, or forcing vacation fun-and-antics upon their reluctant families, or remembering their army duty and barracks bawdiness as the 'best years of their lives', or buying unneeded household gadgets they want to play with, or any of the hundreds of childish behaviors that girlfriends think attractively childlike, until they become wives and find them irritatingly childish.

At the age of eleven or twelve, boys discover a need to bring their existence to the attention of girls of their own age, whom they try to impress by making as much noise and nuisance as possible. They seek opportunities for safely-disguised physical contact, such as throwing the girl against her school locker or knocking her books out of her arms, then they are baffled when their wooing fails to win the girl's heart (which has, of course, been given to an older man...of fourteen or fifteen). Eventually, the first physical

changes appear to suggest the cause of their unaccountable insanity, particularly those sudden, spontaneous erections that cause them considerable local discomfort and social embarrassment until they learn to walk from class to class with their spiral notebooks held at improbable angles. But although the sexual manifestations of their puberty come later than the behavioral ones, once arrived these are dominant and constant. I recently read that the average adolescent boy thinks of sex seven times each hour*.

Once the juices of desire start sloshing and sizzling through his blood, a boy begins to act like a fool and his fantasies resemble the out cuts of a low-budget pornographic film. While girls are engrossed in clothes and cosmetics, boys are thinking of sex. While girls yearn for cossetting and gentle words, boys are thinking of sex. While girls dream of love and romance, boys are thinking of sex. While girls anticipate homes and nest making, boys are thinking of sex. While girls are mentally dressing babies up in soft little...

From the age of eleven or twelve until they reach their mid-sixties men have their serenity, even their dignity, threatened by jolts of testosterone so constantly and to such a dangerous degree that their lives have been insightfully described as 'fifty-five years spent chained to a madman'.

*How do sociologists know things like this? Surely they don't pass out questionnaires. Any boy worthy of the name would lie on such a questionnaire, some in one direction, and some in the other. Of course you know that most statistics cited by writers are blatant fictions designed to lend an aura of scientific precision to their casual observations...76.4% of them, to be exact.

Love on Pearl Street (page 203)

31. '...in comparison to children of today' (p. 206)

The kids of North Pearl were under-educated, they lacked refinement, and they were tough by anyone's standards (several of us did time in reform school and prison, one for manslaughter), but our speech was notably less vulgar than that of most middle-class children today. 'Hell' and 'shit' were common expletives, but 'Christ' and 'God' were rare, with our Catholic worries about taking the name of the Lord our God in vain. 'For Christ's sake!' was an exception. Everyone, even the devout Mrs Dwyer, used this general intensifier, assuming it to fall within the category of pious supplications. I was sufficiently troubled about 'Jeez', which I knew was a sanitized version of Jesus, to decide to give it up. And anyway, Jeez was kid-talk, and I was growing out of all that.

I occasionally saw 'fuck' written on the wall of a public toilet and knew what it meant, but I never heard that word spoken aloud in all my years on Pearl Street. It wouldn't be until I was three thousand miles away in California that I first heard the word aloud. One boy on our block, a kid who had a violent father, a sluttish mother, nits and impetigo, used to say 'frig'. But he was the only one who used even this laundered version of 'fuck', and he did it because of the blood-freezing effect the word had on a potential opponent, which just goes to show how rare it was.

32. *'...the ardent alchemy of Brigid Meehan's left breast' (p. 210)*

A couple of months after that sacrament of ritual passage in Brigid Meehan's hall, I was looking through a book I had nicked from the return cart at the library and carried up to my hidden nest above the sighing, gurgling neo-Gothic radiator, and in it I came across a reproduction of a painting of Agnes Sorel, mistress of Charles VII and epitome of late medieval beauty: a bland, pealed face, large liquid eyes, a small pointed chin, an extravagantly high forehead obtained by plucking back the hairline. She had posed with one perfect, girlish breast revealed. I was fascinated by that breast, the first white breast I had ever been able to examine at length. (In the library's back issues of National Geographic I had seen black breasts of all shapes, sizes, ages, and degrees of flaccidity or pertness, but black breasts were displayed for their educational value and were assumed to be neither provocative nor stimulating.) As I gazed at Agnes Sorel's breast I could imagine what it would feel like if I reached out and touched the small taupe-pink nipple with my fingertip. Because Agnes' breast was small and firm, not long and soft like Brigid Meehan's, I couldn't have held it on my palm. Although the aristocratic Mlle. Sorel's girlish five-hundred-year-old breast was admirable in every way, it was the memory of Brigid Meehan's functional, work-a-world breast that was eventually transferred to my dreams about Sister Mary-Theresa, dreams in which the ineffably complex feeling of that thick, warm liquid-in-a-silken-sack spreading over my palm blended with Sister Mary-Theresa's face beneath her winged wimple coming closer and closer to mine until we began to rise into the night sky...towards nameless ecstasy...towards inexpugable sin.

A last word about Brigid Meehan's left breast:

I was wandering through our back alley one hot Sunday afternoon in late summer, my last summer in Albany, when I happened to notice that the grime-crusting window of one of the long-abandoned stables was broken. By reaching through the broken pane carefully, carefully to avoid cutting my wrist on the glass, I was able to slip back the wooden slide that secured the door. I stepped in and closed the door behind me.

The silence was sudden and heavy. A pallid sunbeam slanted through the dirty window and held in its beam motes of dust that had been set a-swirl by my entry into the still, stale air. As my eyes dilated, an old draught wagon with iron-rimmed wheels emerged from the gloom beyond the sunbeam; there was some dusty straw in the mangers, and I realized that it had only been some thirty years since these stables were in daily use by the thousands of horses that had been Albany's principal means of transportation. The automobile had rushed into dominance so quickly and so totally that all traces of the horse vanished, forgotten, from America's inner cities, where blacksmiths soon became auto mechanics and their forges were transformed into auto repair shops, just as hundreds of public stables became gas stations while private ones were transformed into garages.

Over in the corner of the stable was an old piece of canvas over a mound of hay, and on it there was something yellow. It was the knitted toque that Brigid Meehan used to wear summer and winter. So this must be the place the boys who hung around the

mouth of the alley took Brigid to use her when sexual urgency temporarily rendered them sperm-blind to the danger of Patrick Meehan's insane rage. She must have left it behind. I didn't pick it up, didn't touch it. A shiver of premonition made me leave quickly, and once I was back out in the eye-dazzling sunlight I soon forgot the discovery, and that dilapidated stable with its baritone aroma of ancient horseshit and its eddy of straw dust swirling in a beam of sunlight retreated into the deep recesses of my memory to emerge only when, about forty years later, I learned what eventually happened in that back alley.

I was waiting for transportation from the lobby of a fashionable hotel in San Francisco, when I was approached by a woman who spoke my name interrogatively. "You don't recognize me, do you," she accused half-coquettishly. When I confessed that I didn't, she informed me that she was from the old block, North Pearl Street! She told me her name, and I could place where her family had lived, but I couldn't separate her from the horde of runny-nosed kids a year or two behind me in age, metamorphosed as she was into a professional woman 'power-dressed' in a suit of blue serge pinstripe. In the course of an exchange of 'Whatever happened to old...', she told me that Kathleen Gogarty had become a nun and had gone to serve God in Africa. Then she asked if I remembered poor Brigid Meehan, and before I could answer she said that a year or so after I left North Pearl, Brigid had been found murdered in one of those old stables in the alley behind my apartment house. "Do you remember that back alley?"

The thought of Brigid Meehan dead in my back alley rushed me back in time and place, and I remembered seeing her yellow knit toque on a pile of hay in an disused stable where dust motes swirled in the...

"...Luke?"

"..I'm sorry, I was... What did you say?"

"I asked if you remember that alley."

"Yes...I remember it."

After a couple of minutes the crisp, busier-than-thou businessperson glanced at her watch and said she had a really big meeting on. We agreed that we really must get together and talk about the old days, she no doubt dreading that I might take her up on that as much as I dreaded that she might do the same to me. I sat in the lobby for a time, thinking about Brigid Meehan...her silly yellow toque...her insane brother...her long left breast...so silken and soft in the dark of her hallway that day my mother talked her mother out of her crucifixion between stove and back door. Dead in that abandoned stable. I guessed that one of the men who used her wanted to make sure that she didn't tell Patrick on him.

...Brigid Meehan...Pearl Street...

33. *'...for fear of missing the resolution.'* (p.213)

Although each episode of 'First Nighter' ([explore this here](#)) had different characters and events, the series had a feeling of continuity because they used the same lead actors week after week. At first these were June Meredith and Don Ameche, but eventually Barbara Luddy replaced Miss Meredith, then Les Tremayne replaced Mr

Ameche, only to be replaced, in turn, by Olan Soulé. (Some of these spellings are guesses; this was radio, after all.) My mother's loyalty did not survive all these changes, in part because she particularly loved Don Ameche's creamy baritone voice (and his brother Jim's, too).

34. *'...distinguish the one from the other' (p. 213)*

One of my mother's favorites was "Stella Dallas", the continuing story of a woman who sacrificed everything for her little girl, Laurel (whom Stella called Lolly-Baby), even to the extent of letting her be brought up by rich people who made her into an uppity, refined being whose social class was far above Stella's. Poor self-sacrificing Stella lurched from tragedy to tragedy, but her problems and laments were so similar that six months could pass between illnesses serious enough to nail a boy to his bed where he was so bored that he'd even listen to soap operas. I always had the feeling that I had not missed anything over my six-month absence, except perhaps some of the names had changed and Lolly-Baby needed to be saved from yet another no-account guy.

Another of Mother's favorite heroines was "Ma Perkins", an old gal who had a lumberyard in Indiana or some such place, and whose friends and family were constantly seeking her wholesome advice and motherly solace to guide them through an endless stream of woes, illnesses, accidents, perfidies, swindles, and family tragedies. Through it all, Ma Perkins remained optimistic about human nature. Oh, sometimes she felt battered by wave after wave of tragedy and treachery, but she always managed to look on the sunny side of life...except, of course, for the six months or so when she was blind.

Next to the fruitful device of having the characters fall victim to amnesia, no disaster was so prevalent in Soapland as blindness. The soap operas must have copied effective gimmicks from one another because during the 1939/1940 season the airwaves were swept by an epidemic of blindness that gave the sound effects men unique chances to frighten the listeners with ominous approaching footsteps, or roaring traffic that the poor blind heroine couldn't protect herself from because she couldn't see! (Panic-stab on organ! Honeyed voice of the announcer reminds us to tune in to discover what happens tomorrow 'same time, same station'...Bridge to theme, then to a snappy commercial ditty: Rinso-white! Rinso-white! Happy little washday song!)

Soaps always had several tragedies going on at once, so there was something for the listener to worry about, even when one of the story lines had ground to its grim conclusion. This over-lapping structure produced some pretty complex moments, like when the heroine couldn't accept the rich, handsome, mysterious stranger's offer of marriage because she was being blackmailed for having stolen the letters that wrongly implicated her terminally-ill daughter in a plot to cheat the orphanage out of the money left to it by an unknown benefactor. As you no doubt guessed, one of the orphans was, in fact, the unacknowledged child of the doctor who had misdiagnosed the daughter's illness; and the unknown benefactor was the heroine's long-lost sister, who was only pretending to be dead to avoid anyone finding out that she had eloped with the heroine's daughter's ex-husband, who was...well, all the usual stuff.

Soaps relied heavily on the studio organ that provided not only the theme by which each soap was instantly recognizable but it also intensified the drama by means of such devices as the feathery organ ‘bridges’ that carried us from one locale to another, and the sudden stab of rich two-handed chords that emphasized a climactic moment or italicized a shocking revelation. The soap organist was descended from those splendidly versatile pit organists of the silent film era who, after warming up the audience with a ‘follow the bouncing ball’ sing-along, fleshed out the film with themes suggesting hectic action, deep sadness, mellow calm, or zany nonsense; and with musical analogues for ‘morning’ or ‘springtime’ or ‘evil intentions’ or ‘young love’; and leitmotifs for characters and past incidents; all the while synchronizing a stock of ‘sound effect’ stops for hoof beats, train whistle, falling rain, etc. In both the silent film and the soap opera, the organist often contributed more to dramatic effect than the actors.

I remember once hooting with laughter (and getting a recriminating stare from my mother) when, after weeks of tension and worry, we learned that Lolly-Baby’s terminal disease was, in fact, yet another of those misdiagnoses that were at that moment a feature of soapland’s medical establishment, allowing everyone to emote and lament at full throttle for a couple of weeks, without the producer’s having to replace a character. Another useful accident was a broken leg, which was best when the injury occurred in the course of saving the life of someone who was unconscious and therefore never knew that his brave savior was the very woman he had so woefully wronged when he fell in love with her ungrateful best friend the night she was away helping a neighbor bring an unexpected pregnancy to its natural conclusion during the worst combination flood/earthquake/thunderstorm of the century, (such meteorological ‘production values’ being relatively cheap to stage, as they were created by the sound-effects man). Nothing so gripped the bleeding-but-still-throbbing heart of the devoted soap fan as much as a heroine being immobilized by a broken leg, and unable to get to a crucial telephone call that rang and rang and rang unanswered until the sound was enfolded into the closing organ theme, as the creamy voice of the announcer posed the question that was tantalizing listeners all over America: ...Who on earth could be calling Ma Perkins at this time of night?!

Mother used to accuse me of being heartless when I couldn’t stomach the bathetic depths of sentimentality that she found so touching, so true to life (to her life, as she saw it). So she particularly hated it when I said something sarcastic about the woes and tribulations her heroines suffered, and suffered, and suffered. (Mother’s approximate pronunciation of ‘sarcastic’ injected a certain bitterness into my scoffing: she used to accuse me of being ‘sourcastic’.)

But then, my mother was moved by Judy Garland, who would bravely sing on, a catch of tears in her voice, although her heart was breaking. That heart-broken catch in her voice constituted the entire range of Miss Garland’s histrionic gift, and while it worked for some people, I couldn’t help wanting to shout: Oh, for Christ’s sake, Judy, get a grip on yourself! Mickey Rooney was another of the hokey, lump-in-his-throat actors that I yearned to throttle with my bare hands. And when Judy and Mickey were together in those peppy, low-budget small town musicals in which they raised the money for the

orphanage by ‘putting on a show’, I just couldn’t stay in the theater. There ought to be warning labels on such films to protect people who suffer from diabetes.

On Saturday afternoons, my mother listened to the Thinking Woman’s soap opera, *One Man’s Family*. A sure sign that *One Man’s Family* was head and shoulders above the common run was its pace. I had already inferred from the kinds of books teachers revered and praised that slow pace was a salient characteristic of greatness in literature, and it used to sadden me that so few ‘great’ books were also good. *One Man’s Family* was obviously of superior quality because it was the slowest-paced radio program ever created. Its episodes had titles like: Book twelve, Chapter Eight: ‘Father Barber Wonders If He Should Take a Walk’. And that, my fellow sufferers on a school boy’s sick bed, would be *all that happened*.

And when we realize that soap has gone downhill since its early years on radio...

35. ‘...well-intentioned myth’ (p. 214)

I liked the stories well enough, but I was embarrassed when teachers told me things that I knew were untrue. I remember an intensely sincere nun telling my class that when she was a girl she had experienced a visitation from an aunt who had died and gone to purgatory (as all of us, except for saints, must). This aunt appeared at the doorway of the nun’s bedroom and begged her to do everything she could to avoid dying with even the slightest stain of sin on her soul, because the torments of purgatory, while ultimately beneficial, were so horrible that she didn’t want her darling niece to experience a single second of it. After the aunt disappeared, the little girl lit her lamp and discovered on the frame of the door a handprint *burned into the wood*, so hot was it from the flames of purgatory. While some of the kids in class were distraught by the prospect of such a punishment, I literally twisted in my chair with embarrassment that an adult teacher would stand there and bare-facedly hand me such crap. And a nun, too! I was embarrassed on her behalf, and angry that she had made me feel such embarrassment.

Some years later, when I realized that I was no longer a believing Catholic, or even a Christian, it was with only slight surprise, for I had released my belief gradually, without intending to lose it or even noticing it go. I didn’t undergo one of those scarifying crises of conscience that many intellectual Catholics experience when the comfortable assumptions of a lifetime conflict with observed hypocrisy and the dictates of reason: those searing collisions of mind with spirit that convert many ex-believers into embittered proselytizers for the opposite and equally unprovable position, atheism. Such evangelists for atheism end up ranting on about how the born-again enthusiast is not only concerned with his own salvation but is intent upon assuring yours by means of prohibition, censorship, and legal constraint; and we hear much about the tooth-gnashing hatred that the pious interventionist claims to reserve for the sin, but unfailingly heaps upon the sinner, and about those zealous anti-abortionists who murder doctors to demonstrate their veneration for the Right to Life.

No, I simply realized one day that I hadn’t thought about faith or sin or God for a long time, and if I were to draw up a list of my current concerns, values and interests,

gods and religions would appear nowhere in the first twenty pages...perhaps thirty. My spiritual appetites were not focused on personal salvation, but on the wonders of art and literature. So I didn't become an angry, wounded atheist; I became a mildly indifferent non-theist.

And yet, I still enjoyed the calm and peace of an empty church when I had something to think over, and even today I find the great cathedrals of Europe to be inspiring manifestations of human aspiration, imagination, and soaring creativity.

36. *'...as much as it impressed her' (p.217)*

Although words, language and literature fascinated me, and although, at this period, the nun who was my English teacher was always either at the edges of my mind or the center of my dreams, English was not my favorite subject in school. It was History that attracted the born story-maker in me, for what is history but a rambling story that attempts to explain the past in ways that justify the present? I seldom missed a broadcast of The Cavalcade of America, which offered dramatized (and thoroughly sanitized) biographies of American statesmen and leaders of industry and commerce. Unfortunately, the history taught in school was mostly about rulers, wars, and treaties (bosses, fights and deals, as I saw it). I would have preferred to study things like the history of urbanization, the history of commerce, the history of medicine...and of illness, the history of transportation, the history of wealth...and of poverty, the history of agricultural technology, the history of individual political empowerment, the history of dominant ideas...and fads, cults, and mass hypnoses.

On my own, outside the obligations of school, I memorized the kings of England from William the Bastard to George VI, the American presidents through to FDR, and the rulers of France from Charlemagne to the fall of the Second Empire. (I didn't bother to learn the presidents of the Third Republic, as they changed every couple of months.) For some reason, I also memorized the names and associated virtues of the Nine Worthies (although how Godfrey of Bouillon (Courage) managed to get himself on an equal footing with Julius Caesar, King Arthur, and Charlemagne was more than I could understand. What did he do? Invent a kind of soup?).

I sometimes resented the time wasted memorizing the dates of bosses, fights, and deals for history class, but later I found those dates useful as chronological armatures upon which I could arrange events in intellectual history, art history, or the history of science and technology, and valuable for establishing conjunctions between and among these more useful ways of slicing up the story of mankind.

My interest in history was stimulated by the feeling that Albany was the very cockpit of American history. Fort Nassau, the Dutch river port that became Albany, was built in 1614, six years before the founding of the Plymouth colony. From the first the beaver-trading Dutch were in contact with their dominant Indian neighbors, the Iroquois. It was the Iroquois Confederacy that provided Europeans, and ultimately the neonate American nation, with a working example of a federal union in which decisions were made in open council by the consent of the governed. This was the sole example

available to the Colonists, as the methods of governance in Norse Iceland were not known at that time. It is not without significance that the new nation used the Iroquoian symbol of power, the eagle, as its national emblem, and this 'American' eagle is depicted clutching in its left claw the traditional Iroquoian symbol of strength-in-unity, a bundle of arrows, the message being that while an enemy might be able to break one, none has the strength to break them all together. (One of Cleo's ironies is the fact that a similar symbol of strength-in-unity, the ancient Roman *fascis*, a bundle of rods with a broad bladed axe bound in with them, became the emblem of Mussolini's fascism.)

Not only was much of the Revolution fought along the natural invasion route from Montreal to Albany, but all kinds of interesting people had lived and worked in the three-city conurbia of which Albany is the hub and the smaller cities of Schenectady and Troy the satellites.

Schenectady was the eastern depot of the Erie Canal, which connected the Great Lakes to the Hudson River, bringing the agricultural produces of the West to the seaport of New York City and making that city, despite its eccentric location, the nation's center of trade and commerce, hence of stock and bond trading. Schenectady was chosen by Thomas Edison in 1886 to be the home of the Edison Machine Works, which evolved into General Electric, which, with its experimental laboratories, introduced the Age of Electronics that accounted for most of America's post-smokestack industrial success.

By the 'Thirties, the smallest of the 'tri-cities', Troy, was already in decline from its early glories as a center of the early iron and steel industry. It was better known as the home of the Troy collar, a detachable celluloid device invented by a Troy housewife that became a standard item of male dress for almost a hundred years. Even in my day, advertisements featuring 'the man in the Troy shirt' offered the 1930s ideal of male beauty, with his granite profile, his strong chin, and his neatly parted hair. But I was more interested in Troy's claim to immortality as the home of Samuel Wilson, a tall, rangy Yankee meatpacker with a white goatee. This entrepreneur, who was called 'Uncle Sam' by the workers he treated with gruff paternalism, secured a profitable contract to provide salt beef for the army during the War of 1812. The barrels were stamped 'U. S. Beef' to identify them for the U. S. Army, but the workers and shippers called it 'Uncle Sam's corned beef', and an American national symbol was born to rival England's John Bull and France's Marianne. The scowling, sinewy old Yankee in top hat and tailed coat of red, white, and blue appeared in cartoons in Paris and London that ridiculed the bumptious hick's cocksure swagger and 'don't tread on me' orneriness, while in America, enlistment posters and war bond drives used the same figure to embody self-assured determination and the old New England virtues of square dealing, steadfast purpose, and personal rectitude.

Even smaller towns within the tri-city area made their contributions to American history. Rensselaer had been settled by the Dutch, as its quixotic spelling suggests, and it was here that Richard Shuckburgh, an English doctor, composed 'Yankee Doodle', the words of which ridicule the provincial hick's sartorial affectations. It became a popular fife and drum marching song during the Revolution and was the tune most associated with America in Europe.

(Apropos of patriotic music, the stirring and uplifting ‘America the Beautiful’ would surely have become our national anthem, if political log-rolling on the part of a senior Maryland senator in 1931 hadn’t inflicted on us a pathetic doggerel written by a Maryland lawyer and set to the tune of an English drinking song.)

Watervliet (also Dutch...you can always recognize Dutch because it looks as though the typist’s fingers slipped from the keys) was the modest town where Ben (you’ll meet him later in this book) worked for awhile, digging drainage ditches. Watervliet’s other claim to glory is its association with a remarkable woman, Ann Lee. Mother Ann, as she came to be known, was a religious phenomenon. Born to a blacksmith’s wife in Manchester, England, at the age of twenty-two she joined the Shaking Quakers, and soon became a luminary in that exuberant throw-back from what had by then become the solemn and circumspect Quakers. In 1770, when she was thirty-four years old, she was thrown into prison for the vehemence of her anti-establishment preaching. While in prison Mother Ann had a revelation that led her to establish the cult known as the Shakers, or more formally, The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing. She taught her followers that Christ had been the male manifestation of god’s dual nature, and that she, Mother Ann, was god’s female manifestation and she constituted the promised Second Coming.

In 1774 Ann Lee brought eight disciples to America to create her utopia. They settled in Watervliet where they established the principles and the routine of life that we now identify with the Shakers. Even in the colonies, Mother Ann was imprisoned for her pacifist doctrines and her refusal to sign an oath of allegiance. (It would appear that George III had his MacCarthyites.) But she continued to preach, to organize, to convert, and to heal by the laying on of hands. No figure is more representative of the religious fervor and millennial zealotry that swept over the colonies immediately before the War of Independence. By the time Mother Ann was recalled to union with the Father and the Son, the community had grown to several thousand converts; and by the 1820s the Shakers had expanded throughout New England and spilled out into Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana; and everywhere they were respected for their hard work and their unimpeachable honesty, as well as for the quality of their handicrafts. They were not only hard-working and honest, they were clever and inventive. Although they abjured the crass commercialism of applying for patents, the Shakers invented the screw propeller, the circular saw, a turbine waterwheel, a practical threshing machine, even the simple forked clothespin. They were also the first to market seeds in little packets. But they are best known for their furniture which, with its carefully chosen and aged wood, its painstaking craftsmanship, and its absolute functionalism was the most significant American contribution to domestic interior design.

The sect was known, not only for hard work, communal living, shared duties and possessions, scrupulous honesty, and its belief in a female second coming, but also, alas, for its commitment to celibacy, and this appears to have had a detrimental effect on their ability to go forth and multiply. They relied exclusively on converts to increase their flock, but as the spasms of mid-Nineteenth Century revivalist fever burnt themselves out, their numbers diminished and their communities grew older and unable to perform the

tasks demanded by their hard, healthful living. In the 1850's there were more than five thousand practicing Shakers; by the opening of the Twentieth Century, fewer than a thousand; and although the 'Seventies brought in a handful of dazed flower children from the decaying hippie communes, the Shakers have now passed into history.

But Watervliet can claim to have been the home of Mother Ann, the feminine Christ of the Second Coming.

The eddies of history swirled around Albany.

37. *'...personal experience of the positive power of prayer' (p.222)*

Her talk about the mystic power of prayer left me feeling embarrassed on her behalf. Typical product of Western thought that I am, my first impulse has always been to reject the superstitious, the otherworldly, the supernatural. And when I met somebody who believed in gods, ghosts, demons, angels, or spirits, I assumed that this person was either foolish, weak or damaged. I felt sorry for such people, but I was also embarrassed by them. Even when considering such relatively common events as telepathy, prescient dreams, and what have been termed 'psychic screams', I preferred to think that I was dealing with phenomena for which the explanation has not yet been found, rather than with forces or events that are extra-logical or sur-rational. I would rather admit that my understanding is limited than accept illogical explanations, this despite the fact that I myself have experienced the mystic transport that is the ultimate goal of Eastern meditation, and reliable, intelligent people have told me of events that can neither be explained nor explained away by our current understanding of physics or psychology.

38. *'...whispered into the darkness' (p. 227)*

I am aware that these recollections of Father Looney and our down-market salvation stall have a quality of impressionistic caricature about them, but I have written what I find in my memory. This does not mean that I have written the truth, because, like all natural story-tellers, I burnished and gilded my experiences right from the beginning, when I came home after six-o'clock mass and told my mother over breakfast what had happened. I always shaped and embellished the moments so they would be more interesting. And it may well be these honed and polished versions of reality that have lodged in my memory, rather than the duller, more pedestrian events as they occurred.

The story-teller differs from the liar in that he tells you what he honestly remembers, but he should occasionally admit that his memories have been buffed and burnished.

A Cowboy Called Ben (page 233)

39. *'...would do four months later'* (p. 239)

We tend to forget that these four nations were members of the Axis, despite the fact that some of them, the Romanians for instance, were among the most enthusiastic in seeking a final solution to 'the Jewish question'.

40. *'...and chilling, too.'* (p. 239)

The mention of Edward R. Murrow's grave, considered reportage brings to mind the contrasting cheap gimmickry and muck-raking of radio's most popular purveyor of news and facts in the late '30s and early '40s: Walter Winchell, whose weekly programs began with the beeps of a telegraph key over which came his machine-gun spiel, 'Good evening Mr and Mrs North and South America and all the ships at sea, let's go to press!...Flash!' Then Winchell would swing into his particular blend of gossip, insinuation and snide innuendo that someone aptly labeled 'insinuendo.'

Most radio listeners had a 'favorite' news commentator, one whom they trusted more than the others. This was seldom a commentator who cast a fresh light on events, but rather one whose viewpoint confirmed and reinforced the listener's preconceptions and prejudices. Those who liked their scandal and smut mixed with liberal pro-Roosevelt inclinations listened to Walter Winchell or Gabriel Heatter; those who were anti-New Deal preferred Fulton Lewis, H. V. Kaltenborn or Boake Carter. But all future male newscasters would take Edward R. Murrow as their model, down to his chesty voice placement, his slightly precious pronunciation, and his wryly-knowlegeable tone ([explore this here](#)). The early radio commentators had had to invent a way to do what had never been done before: to speak out the news over the airwaves, arranging the information in time, not in space as print journalists arranged it, and to do so in tones and accents that would make them seem caring and aware. At the same time they sought to avoid alienating their nation-wide listeners who spoke in many local accents and idioms. It was these radio news pioneers who invented the neutral-but-kindly 'sound of the newsman'. With little to guide them but the clear, slightly artificial elocutionists of the Chautauqua and Lyceum circuits, they came up with that now-universal "accent-from-nowhere" which is also an accent-from-everywhere, the "mid-American sound" we hear to this day, with its mellow head tones, its heavily significant delivery, its assured and comforting baritone...the total effect being a faintly masturbative relationship between the self-involved speaker and his vocal cords.

Early television added nothing to this sound but a face, just as television news was little more than radio news with a hole kicked in the front of the set so you could see the reporter speaking into his microphone, usually a man in a too-tight, too-shiny suit and hair so gorgeously coiffured that he could pass for a television evangelist.

As television entered its adolescence, regional news producers eager to increase their ratings while performing their public service obligations decorated their news presentations with "color" personalities in weather and sports slots...cuties to do the

weather and dummies to do the sports; and soon the real news was squeezed down to headlines, to save space for ‘human interest’ clips and ambulance chasing...all fast, hot, and gossipy. When it dawned on television executives that information could be a saleable item, the tone of newscasts became lighter and more playful, and it was not rare to see a smiling, chipper reporter get two or three lines into the tragic death of a child before he remembered to frown and lower his voice to a solemn tremor.

In time, stations and networks added women to the news desk, and these women had to develop sounds and techniques for themselves, as Ed Murrow’s avuncular ‘voice of sympathetic authority’ would obviously not serve. Some of them succeeded in carving out niches for themselves beside the glib lads with the succulent ‘FM voices’ and the layered, lacquered haircuts; but many cultured listeners were repelled from electronic news drilled at them in the spiky, hard-charging tone that became the female newscaster’s predominant idiom.

In the end, television news failed to build on the groundwork done by radio pioneers. The greed of the news packagers and the voyeurism of the mass audience combined to reduce television news to the trivial and the distasteful. News became another kind of entertainment, one capable of providing millions of stunned, staring viewers for the advertisers. Fortunes were made by information entrepreneurs offering networks that specialized in superficial, sensational, grass-fire journalism, and a democracy of intellectually lazy voters let its primary source of information be reduced to optical narcotics. The majority of our nation receives its information from entertainers, a fast-food variant of news that is trimmed and spiced and sweetened to be tasty and filling, but without intellectual nutrients. Then, stuffed to the ears with this superficial, ersatz information, they waddle out and vote. Look at the president you’re voted in.

(Note: I was obliged to write the above note a month before the election, so I devised a last sentence applicable to either of the candidates.)

41. ‘...I enjoyed privileged access’ (p. 246)

To demystify quickly, let me describe a typical voyage to The Other Place. When I was in school, bored and yearning to be *somewhere*, doing *something*, but the teacher’s voice droned on out there just beyond the limens of my attention; or when I was sitting on my bed, looking out onto the night street, worrying about money or my mother’s health, or wondering if we would ever get off Pearl Street; I would sometimes become aware of a slight tingling in my chest followed by the sensation of rising up; then I was floating towards a small up-tilted mountain meadow flooded with sunlight. I would come closer and closer to the soft grass until I blended into that meadow. More exactly, the meadow and I inter-penetrated and I was of it and it was of me, as I became a part of everything in creation, and I understood everything in a wordless, pre-logical way that was not quite understanding but, rather, a comfortable and comforting acceptance that didn’t require understanding. The feeling of total and eternal peace permeated me, and I would hover there (for it was a place as much as a state) safe and happy, the sun shining on and through me, the wind rippling through my grass, until something called me back, like a

teacher's voice speaking my name, or a class-ending bell, or until my spirit was sufficiently refreshed; then I could come back, slightly dazed and dazzled by the hard-edged reality around me, but calm in my marrow and with the pleasant sensation of an eternal smile blooming within me. In real time this voyage could be anything from a couple of seconds to a few minutes...never more, although time didn't exist in The Other Place, or existed in some different form.

In formal mystic commentary, the nirvana state that I call The Other Place is more properly, called 'meditative ecstasy', but I find 'ecstasy' to be an unacceptably emotive label for what was, for me, the simplest, calmest, most natural of events, one that I had experienced for as long as I could remember.

In fact, I may have experienced this 'ecstasy' even before my memory began, for some students of mysticism maintain that this nirvana state exists in the womb and continues for some time after birth, lasting through that period when the deep violet, defocused eyes of an infant are described by Basque peasants as 'still seeing the angels'. This period of spiritual narcosis that all neonates enjoy is understood to be a sort of psychic cushion against the shocks of birth and the assaults of early sensory experience, access to The Other Place serving the spiritual being in a way analogous to colostrum for the somatic being, the one providing the balm of soul-silence, the other providing immunoglobulins. Then both defense systems dry up and disappear when they are no longer needed.

But for a small number of people, the gate to ecstatic retreat remains ajar for a while. Because, for this fortunate few, access to the state that is the ultimate goal of all meditative systems is simple and spontaneous, they are said to achieve mystic transport through the Higher Path, while others are obliged to toil their long and difficult ways along the Lower (less noble) Path of meditative exercise, fasting, chanting, and all the other body/mind/spirit disciplines that are believed to point the way to peace and to oneness with all things.

You might wonder why, if these retreats to The Other Place were so important a part of my emotional life, I haven't mentioned them before now. The reason is simple: they were such normal and unremarkable experiences to me that they went unnoticed until I suddenly realized that I had lost the ability to take those brief moments of spiritual recuperation. I might offer the analogy of breathing. One wouldn't bother to mention that he was in the habit of breathing unless something happened to make it difficult or impossible.

I have always felt uncomfortable with applying the technical term 'meditative ecstasy' to my simple, natural glides into The Other Place. With my logic-bound Hellenic/European limitations, I cannot avoid associating 'ecstasy' with the disturbing and sometimes distasteful quasi-sexual transports of martyrs. I once stood before Bernini's powerful and disturbing medley of sculpture, painting, and light, *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa of Avila*, and I gazed with engrossed malaise upon that suffering martyr, half rising from her bed of sumptuous torment, her eyes turned up in what every man recognizes to be an expression of orgasmic transport, as winds of religious rapture flutter through the delicate marble fabric of her clothing. I had the impression that if I were to

lean over and sniff the statue's open mouth, I would perceive the delicious, faintly acrid fragrance of climax on her breath. Saint Theresa's kind of ecstasy has nothing in common with my gentle respites in The Other Place. One is passion, the other peace; one is turbulence, the other calm. 'Transport' would perhaps be a better name than 'ecstasy' for the phenomenon of The Other Place, both because it avoids orgiastic implications, and because visiting The Other Place is as much spatial in feeling as it is spiritual, although the voyage occurs within one's being. In addition, the word 'transport' comes close in the idiomatic usage: 'She was transported with joy,' although if applied to mystic ecstasy the preposition 'with' would be misleading: one is transported *by* joy, and *to* joy.

I lost my ability to slip into The Other Place when I was eleven...I don't know exactly when, but there was a moment when I realized that I hadn't been there in a long time, and I closed my eyes and let go of everything...but nothing happened, and I knew with a chill in my heart that I would never be able to go there again. (This isn't exactly true, because I did go to The Other Place one further time, when I needed its peace and comfort terribly, but that isn't told in this book.)

Those who have lost access and feel a need to regain it must commit themselves to years of meditative exercise, and even then it is not sure that they will find their way along the uncertain and difficult Lower Path to the state they achieved so naturally and casually as babies gliding down the Higher Path. But even those who fail to reach meditative ecstasy along the stony Lower Path have the consolation that the voyage itself can be of benefit. Sadly, some seek the Higher Path through chemicals. This is always an error; it never works, and the danger of damage is great.

It was no accident that my loss of access to The Other Place coincided with my romantic fantasies about Sister Mary-Theresa. Most writers on mystic ecstasy claim that there is a fundamental incompatibility between it and sexual release (perhaps because they are, to some degree, functionally redundant), and this is why even those children who are lucky enough to retain the key to the Higher Path after infancy, lose it as they enter puberty. This would also explain why all the mystics and saints who have found ecstasy through the Lower Path have been celibates. If it is in the nature of things that the advent of sexual maturity banish a child's mystic ecstasy, that would explain why I didn't even notice the loss for a long time. It wasn't until after Thanksgiving, that least treacherous and burdensome of holidays, that the realization of my loss came to me one night as I was sitting on the edge of my bed, worrying about what would happen to Mother and Ben when their plans for a tourist camp in the West turned out to be nothing but dream-fluff, as I was sure they would. I am a born worrier with a gift for conceiving the worst outcome for any situation, and in this case I imagined scenes in which their failure led to recriminations, arguments, and separation, and I ended up once again responsible for dragging Mother's dream ship into the loading dock. After fretting myself into the kind of self-inflicted panic that used to send me searching for the balm of The Other Place, it occurred to me that I hadn't been to The Other Place for a long time. A very long time. I tried to relax and gently nudge my worries to one side as I let my mind slide into transport...but nothing happened. No lift of the spirit, no slight tingle in the blood, no up-tilted alpine meadow, no sense of ever-unfolding peace as I became one with the grass

and the rustle of the wind. At first I was puzzled; then, as the realization grew that The Other Place might be forever closed to me, I went through all the stages of panic and despair that others who have experienced withdrawal from meditative ecstasy report experiencing. I could not imagine life without those moments of refuge and refreshment. Well...I could imagine it, because I have a fertile imagination for all that is dark and painful, but I couldn't see much point to living so psychically crippled as that.

But life goes on. Experiences comes, and love; work comes, and responsibilities; and one somehow gets on with it, hobbling a little at first, but ultimately healthy enough to make it through the day. Those who are blessed with access to the Other Place throughout their childhood years inevitably have to pay a price in emotional withdrawal when, finally, the gift leaves them and they are obliged to face life's assaults and erosions without their spiritual opiate. They experience anger and resentment because something has been stolen from them, and these emotions serve only to drive The Other Place yet farther away because, as every trudger along the Lower Path knows, mystic peace recoils in the face of the destructive lower emotions such as hate, envy, resentment, and greed.

Since a time so far back in my memory that my glimpses of recall are more like snapshots than narratives, slipping off to The Other Place was as natural as the heartbeat I could sometimes feel in my ears late at night, and I gave the one no more thought than the other. Throughout those early years of effortless refuge, I never applied the name 'The Other Place' to either the experience or the destination. Only later did I have to come up with a name for these inward voyages so I could ponder the significance of their loss.

I have described the physical aspects of The Other Place as a small up-tilted mountain meadow. Of course, I didn't use those words at the time, for I had never seen a mountain meadow. It wasn't until years later when hiking alone in the mountains of central Hokkaido that I came upon a small alpine meadow that I recognized with surprise as the setting for my Other Place...not the specific, identical setting, but one that had all its suddenly remembered elements. Since that *déjà connu* experience, I have spent as much time in the mountains as I could. That is why I came to the Pyrenees and shall see my life out here.

Years after I lost the ability to recover from the abrasions of life by passing a healing moment in The Other Place, I discovered that students of meditation and mysticism have long been familiar with the phenomenon, even down to the detail of the up-tilted mountain meadow. Access to what I call The Other Place is, in fact, the ultimate goal of most Eastern meditative and spiritual exercise.

I wrote about this mystic phenomenon in two novels (*Shibumi, Incident at 20-Mile* –ed.), where I introduced characters who were able to retreat into the Other Place. One of these characters eventually lost the ability, as I lost mine, and he was obliged to pass through a gethsemene of withdrawal before he could live without excessive longing for what was lost. The other had a ghastly experience: psychologically weakened by traumatic events, he ended up marooned in a grotesque imitation of the Other Place he

had known as a child, and he never found his way back to reality. He lived out the rest of his life, not in the soul-spa of the Other Place, but in the personal hell of Someplace Else.

By coincidence, for there is nothing genetic involved, my oldest daughter was also able to take the Higher Path to the Other Place until she reached sexual maturity, and she knows the calm, restorative security of that state as well as the depression and anguish occasioned by losing access to it.

42. *'...electrical things that didn't work' (p. 248)*

As a result of Ben's theory-plus-practice-plus-generalization style of teaching and his jocular demystification of the jargon and methods of the 'experts', I was no longer in awe of the mysteries of technology.

To this day, technology and science intrigue me. I am, for instance, exhilarated by the oxymoronic leaps involved in Big Bang theory: like that place/moment when space/time merge so that 'when?' and 'where?' are the same question; or like that space/moment when all the matter of the universe was just a bit less than infinitely dense, and occupied just a bit more than zero space. Splendid stuff with which to exercise the imagination! Almost as challenging as following Browning through the complexities of Sordello. All my interest in science and technology I owe to Ben's patient, humorous explanations of such concepts as leverage, the mechanical advantage of the pulley, and the inclined plane.

This brings to mind an example of Ben's humor: Why is a blotter like a lazy dog? Because a blotter is an ink-lined plane, and an inclined plane is a slope up, and a slow pup is a lazy dog...well, I guess you had to be there. And be an admiring boy of eleven.

43. *'...The Ink Spots' (p. 254)*

The Ink Spots (a name that would be considered a PC affront today) did for Negro musicians what Jackie Robinson would later do for Black athletes: they pioneered their followers' acceptance by the mass of White America. The Ink Spots' arrangements of popular ballads were led by the preciously-articulated falsetto of their top tenor (a sound that would become an idiom of Motown male groups) and this lead line was contrasted with the slack, 'Kingfisher' recitative of their deep, moist bass. So characteristic (and, yes, sometimes so hokey) were their arrangements that Spike Jones' comic 'City Slickers' did a madcap parody of their 'You Always Hurt the One You Love'.

The names of the original members of this beloved and groundbreaking quartet reflected the Black American's gift for original if quixotic nomenclature: Deek Watson, Hoppy Jones, Charlie Fuqua, and Slim Green. God bless 'em.

North Pearl Street Goes to War (page 269)

44. '*...Monday, December 8*' (p. 274)

The attack occurred on the 7th for us, but on the 8th for the Japanese, on the other side of the international date line. (The strange timing of announcements can be explored here http://www.otr.com/r-a-i-new_pearl.shtml)

Note: Through the kindness of Bill Daly, a long-time friend with a nostalgic appreciation and an extraordinary knowledge of cultural minutiae of the era, I have received much guidance and correction, among which was a scratchy transcription of the first radio announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor, which I quote in this passage.

* good place to begin an exploration of this event is <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/pearlharbor>

45. '*...out-shout the competition*' (p. 275)

The attack on Pearl Harbor was one of the last times that newspaper 'extras!' would be the public's principal access to breaking news. Radio carried the news more immediately than print, if more shallowly. But not so shallowly as commercial television, which was medium-bound to the visual, so the 'news' became limited to that which made juicy pictures. Television's natural 'news' was of multiple car pile-ups, mass murders, fires, wars, all multiples of the ambulance-chasing news that is at the core of television journalism, which has comment but no real discussion or analysis, evoking only basic emotions like wonder, surprise and pity. Not the least objectionable element of television news and evidence of the celebrity-chasing madness of our time are those interviews with bereaved parents desperate for their chance to emote on national television.

The best I ever did hawking extras was when Roosevelt defeated Wendell L. Willkie to win an unprecedented third term in office. Willkie, a shaggy, gruff-voiced, likable man whose international vision of America's role and responsibilities was at variance with the isolationist core of his Republican party, had been a Democrat until his conviction that, while those elements of the New Deal that had to do with social justice should be kept, many of the bureaucratic restraints on business were damaging to the nation. After breaking through the business-is-America chant of the old Republican party to become the dark horse candidate for the 1940 election, Willkie feared that a blend of Roosevelt's Groten-elitist anglophilia and Hollywood's fraternal concern for the fate of Jews in Europe might drag America into a European war caused by ill-considered, vindictive (but strangely unmonitored) restrictions placed on post-World War I Germany's feeble democracy, leading to the economic chaos and resentment that facilitated Hitler's rise. Willkie's sympathies were thoroughly anti-Nazi, but he thought America should fight Hitler with economic and industrial aid only, in part because Germany's limited resources made America invulnerable to invasion, and in part because he considered it inevitable that Germany would attack the Soviet Union, the vast manpower potential of which would sound the knell for Nazism. Despite his late start in the electoral race, the vast popularity of Roosevelt among the common people, and the

merely token support he got from the hard-line Republican establishment, Willkie's balance of social justice and sound finances and his message to "...spend American financial and industrial resources in aid of England and France, not American blood" touched a deep cord in the American heartland, and thousands of grass-roots "Willkie for President" clubs sprang up, mostly in small towns and minor cities, while Roosevelt held the big cities and the farms. In the end, although Willkie carried only ten states he received the largest popular vote that any Republican candidate for president (including the successful ones) had ever received up to that time*, and his threat had been palpable enough to oblige Roosevelt, who was looking for a justifiable opportunity to enter the war on the side of England, to assure the nation in a Fire-side Chat radio message (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/audio/volpe_audio/fDrhtml) that he would never send American boys to fight in Europe.

Like Roosevelt, Willkie died before the war was over. In his fourth term wartime election, Roosevelt was opposed by Thomas Dewey, an upright, hard-working, uniquely unexciting politician whose Hitler-style mustache was as great an electoral liability as was his crisp, unconcealed intelligence, for the American voter prefers his leader to be a reg'lar fella, not one of them uppity egg-head intellectuals with ideas and vision and all that sort of crap.

During the golden age of the founding fathers, when an intellect as sharp and a mind as lofty as Jefferson's was at the service of our republic, we were so rich in potential leaders that such men as Webster, Clay, and Hamilton were never called to the presidency. The tyranny of mass mediocrity over American politics began with that most common of all common men, Andrew Jackson, with whom we entered the era of the professional politician, the bought candidate, and the political 'boss'. Not until Wilson and Roosevelt would men of superior education and intellectual quality overcome America's rural-fundamentalist tendency to equate breeding, refinement and intelligence with evil and trickery. (It must be admitted in passing, that from a civil rights point of view, Wilson was a pretty nasty piece of work.) After the Depression was over and the nation no longer felt the need for a superior man like Roosevelt, we returned to our historical mistrust of leaders who were culturally or intellectually superior to the 'common man'. Willkie and Dewey, now largely forgotten, were the Republican Party's last ventures with men of intellectual capacity. Starting with Eisenhower, the Grand Old Party sought to satisfy mid-America's preference for candidates of limited intelligence and narrow culture—reg'lar fellas—and went on to provide the anti-intellectual mass of the voting public with such cerebral pigmies as Gerald Ford and James Danforth Quayle before coming up with the risible but painfully earnest George W. Bush.

Both Nixon and Clinton were fairly intelligent...guileful and crafty, at any rate. This is proof that intelligence alone is not sufficient to make a worthy president; there must also be a modicum of character, personal dignity and respect for the office.

In Reagan's case, it was always difficult to differentiate among intellectual paucity, mythomania, and paranoia when one sought the source of those nutty confections 'star wars', 'trickle down economics', and 'the evil empire'.

*This was before the Republican Party fell into the hands of the anti-cultural mob of religious fundamentalists that is always simmering out there on the edges of American civilization, eager to inflict their views and limitations on their fellow citizens. These people represent a greater danger to our liberal traditions because they are not without intelligence. Their lack of high culture makes them seem stupid to liberals of the northeastern establishment, but the liberal community dismisses them at their risk. On the level of square peg in square hole, many of these people are clever...wily, in fact, and perfectly capable of snatching an election from over-confident liberals, even burdened with the current president.

{NB: When these words were written, Trevanian had no idea that exhibitionist elements within the gay community would throw a crucial election away with their insistence on being allowed to throw bridal bouquets at one another, much as the Greens had thrown the previous election away. The liberal establishment has its burdens and its embarrassments, too.}

46. '*...substitute for whipped cream*' (p. 276)

Kraft seemed to specialize in the ersatz with Kraft Velveeta, a cheese substitute, Kraft Miracle Whip, a mayonnaise substitute, and Kraft Parkay margarine, a butter substitute.

Flash: I have been informed that within the liberal definitions of the American dairy industry, Velveeta qualifies as a cheese. And it's true that if you close your eyes and concentrate, you can tell that it is flavored in the direction of a very bland, very smooth, Somerset cheddar. So I suppose that with this product we have a real cheese masquerading as an industrial ersatz. Who could ask for more?

47. '*...withstand the power of...?*' (p. 276)

Our attitudes towards our Axis opponents varied widely. Few of us were even aware that the Axis included Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria. The generally acknowledged enemies were Germany, Italy and Japan. Of these, the Germans seemed the most formidable, and not only because Hollywood had for several years been showing us the sneering, arrogant Prussian. There was also the fact that, despite Germans being part of our preferred, northern European immigrant stream (as differs from our more recent, but mistrusted and resented, Slavic, Jewish, and southern European streams), they had been our opponents in the First World War, when Italy and Japan had been our allies. We were accustomed to the idea of Germans as the enemy, and 'Butchers of Belgian Babies', World War I propaganda that still clung to them*.

Right from the first, we dismissed the Italians as third-rate fighters dragged into the war by the strutting, pouting, opera-buffo figure of Mussolini, whose army had had a hard time with pre-industrial Ethiopia. The almost universally held assumption that the Italian wasn't a natural fighter is another example of the victory of cultural stereotype over experience and evidence. The most violent and aggressive men of America's recent history were the Mafiosi. And any kid living on the streets of big-city America knew that Italian kids were among the roughest. In addition, Italians were beginning to show their toughness as professional boxers that would bring them to dominate the sport in the Forties and Fifties.

But while our Italian enemies were viewed as clowns, and the Germans as evil automatons, we reserved our detestation and revulsion for the Japanese, who were obvious targets for racial hatred because, like Blacks, they were easy to pick out in the passing parade. Their values and behavior were outside our Christian, Eurocentric ideals of civilization. While we could hate and fear the Nazis, our feelings towards the Japanese were of a lower, more visceral sort: we loathed them. We were grudgingly obliged to grant that the Germans were efficient and well-organized, but, despite the obvious quality of the Japanese fleet and aircraft, and the sophistication of the military planning that allowed them to surprise us and destroy the greater part of our Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, we never believed they could beat a great industrial power like America. The very word 'Japanese' was evocative of cheap, tinny merchandise. Furthermore, they were all tiny, all bow-legged, all extraordinarily near-sighted, and much given to leering and to grinning toothily. Our cartoonists drew them to resemble monkeys.

But Americans weren't alone in their racism. Most Japanese viewed, and still view, other cultures and peoples, even their nearest Asian neighbors, with dismissive contempt. It was our shared racism that allowed us to treat one another as sub-humans, and this led to inexpressible cruelties and barbarism on both sides. It made the horrors of Japanese prison camps possible, and Hiroshima.

*Positive roles were also carried over from the First World War to the Second. It explains France's position as a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations, which is composed of the countries that won the Second World War...and France.

48. '*...the last year of peace*' (p. 282)

What a great crop of popular songs 1941 produced!
I Hear a Rhapsody, My sister and I, Chattanooga Choo Choo, Amapola, Marie Elena, Daddy, The White Cliffs of Dover, I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire, The Wise Old Owl (said who? who? who?), It All Comes Back to Me Now, There'll Be Some Changes Made, High on a Windy Hill, Green Eyes, and two of my favorite Ink Spots hits: Do I Worry? and Whispering Grass. ([explore these here](#))

49. '*...was out of pocket.*' (p. 286)

I have always been glad I had this early encounter with Capitalism as seen from the angle of the exploited. Over the years, my understanding of the essential spirit of Capitalism was broadened and deepened by experience. In my time I have worked from Texas to Canada as a migratory crop picker. I've been a loading-dock grunt, and a waiter in both family-style troughs and opulent restaurants (this last because I was able to read the French menu). I have worked in a cannery on repetitious, mind-numbing twelve-hour shifts, and one winter I blasted dirt off passenger cars with a high-pressure steam hose, my overalls and eyebrows stiff with frozen mist so that my walk was a waddle and my glance an unblinking stare. For a time I was a factory hand doing piece-work with so low

a unit value that one had to risk his fingers in the hungry machinery to make a living wage, and later I was a metal-cleaner obliged to breathe acid fumes and a hanging fog of minute iron filings and asbestos dust. I have sold shoes in Oregon and encyclopedias in Washington, D.C., and I've punched cards on a proto-computer. I was a night-shift watchman in a freight yard, picking my way through complex networks of slippery, glistening railroad tracks, always listening over my shoulder for 'creepers', those single freight cars that are set in motion by mule engines then left to coast to their destination in the darkness of the yard, with only a soft click-click, click-click to alert the fatigue-dazed worker to the danger of being crushed. These experiences honed my sense of social injustice and made me a committed socialist, although never an advocate of the nationalization of industry, because politicians and government time-servers are at least as corrupt as capitalist entrepreneurs, and much less competent. Without these personal experiences of capitalism, I might have ended up with just the middle-class liberal's self-satisfied fellow feeling for the exploited underdog.

So I know the vicious capitalist scramble up the ladder of success in which the sign of the loser is a finger crushed on the ladder rung, and the sign of the winner is a gory heel. And I observe with considerable interest today's generation of slave-meat in the big business abattoir. The exploited workers of my day were expendable 'hands' paid as little as possible to make, move, and sell the Product, then discarded. We were easy targets, under-educated, jealous of one another, weak, often cheated by the gangsters who ran our unions.

But the exploited workers of today are not semi-literate working class 'hands; but middle-class, largely college-educated 'minds' employed by faceless international corporations that suck their energies and talents dry by constant 'down-sizing', by out-sourcing, by project-based hiring that avoids the cost of health insurance and retirement plans, and by devices that force the staff to compete among themselves for survival. Then, when the workers are in their forties, they are cast aside and replaced by younger, less expensive minds, which in their turn will be sucked dry of their energy and youth, and cast aside. This new generation of exploited workers consists of people who, addicted to the narcotic of consumerism, work long hours without the dignity of job security that is the natural right of a free person. 'Success' in such rat race involves being willing to become a manager who will drive others around the treadmill; but even this debased and debasing kind of 'success' is no guarantee against dismissal when a yet more desperate and bloodthirsty manager comes along.

Abused workers of my day could defend themselves only with the strike and violence...violence that was met by shutouts and scabs wielding ax-handles. But the abused workers of today, if they can muster the guts and the organization, are better equipped to protect themselves or, that failing, to avenge themselves. They are skillful at using—and destroying—the computer programs and data bases upon which their oppressors rely.

I anticipate the new electronic revolution with great interest.

50. *'...H. V. Kaltenborn' (p. 289)*

Considering the hate propaganda against Germans, it was perhaps just as well that few people knew that H. V. Kaltenborn's initials stood for 'Hans von'.

51. *'...therefore praiseworthy...also spooky' (p. 289)*

When many of their best musicians went into the army and navy, the Big Bands could no longer produce that broad-front, locked-up sound that was the essence of the Swing era. (Swing was a formulated off-shoot of jazz that featured, not soloists emerging from the joyous anarchy of the jazz band to do improvised licks and solo riffs, but full orchestras under the control of a leader/arranger who contributed well-rehearsed lead riffs on the instrument with which he was identified. Tommy Dorsey played a trombone and bore the syncopated nickname 'The Sentimental Gentleman of Swing'. His saxophonist brother, Jimmy, was a less popular but more innovative musician. As a kid, I got the idea there was some connection between playing the trombone and wearing glasses, because Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller both wore glasses. Miller, whose theme song was 'Moonlight Serenade', died in a plane accident during the war (the kind of death that attracts highly embroidered conspiracy theories, like the deaths of Elvis Presley and John Kennedy). Miller's sound was among the most easily recognized, a melting blend of saxophones with a clarinet on top that owed a lot to the arranger, Tex Beneke. Benny Goodman 'The King of Swing' played the clarinet as did many of the great Jewish swing and jazzmen. Goodman's band was a fertile breeding ground for future band leaders like the drummer Gene Krupa and the trumpeter Harry James, whose theme song was 'Ciribiribin', and who was much envied by soldiers during the war because he was married to the Second World War's hottest pin-up, Betty Grable.

With the exception of three heart-throb meteors: Russ Colombo, whose 'tragic' early death rivaled Valentino's as a chance for grieving fans to vie in displaying the degree of their grief, Rudy Vallee with his nasal, megaphoned, Ivy League whine; and the bone-less crooning of Bing Crosby; singers of the pre-war Big Band era were relatively unimportant side-bar performers. They did their one or two verses and a refrain, then returned to their chairs, where they served a largely decorative function. But with the loss of so many musicians to the services in 1942, bandleaders were replaced by singers as the stars of popular music, and lyrics took precedence over melody.

52. *'...precise diction was a bad'un' (p. 291)*

This assumption was consonant with America's anti-elite, anti-urban, anti-cultural belief that education is the ultimate enemy of blind patriotism and blind religious conformity. The good cowboys, the Whitehats, said Yup and Shucks as they slurred their vowels and got tangled up in their consonants*—all proofs that they were pure of spirit, lofty of character, and uncontaminated by big city values and the soul-rot of education and culture; while the Blackhats, with their fancy waistcoats, combed hair and fluidity of speech, clearly lacked the folksy virtues of honesty, sincerity and compassion.

This widely-held Puritan identification of the angel with the hick and the devil with the sophisticate was uncomfortable for me, because I had a taste for learning and for delectable words well spoken, and yet I thought of myself as a Whitehat (indeed, in my story games I had been a successful and famous leader of a band of Whitehats). Fortunately for my self-esteem, there was Franklin D. Roosevelt, proof that a model of patrician upbringing and liberal education could not only be a Whitehat, but the Whitehat-in-Chief, at least to the Poor of America, if not to those capitalist drones who labeled him a ‘traitor to his class’. Unfortunately, he was to be followed into office by one hick after another, politicians who knew they would have to chew their words and speak in clichés and slack idioms to avoid alienating the mass American who yearns to believe that he is led, not by a superior person educated to perform his role, but by a flawed and folksy regular guy with whom the voter can personally identify. Such candidates for office as could not manage to dumb down sufficiently for the mass electorate, Adlai Stevenson, for instance, or Mario Cuomo, paid the price. But most candidates didn’t have to dumb down. Reagan and the Bushes could play it straight, as they possessed the intellectual and cultural limitations necessary to getting elected in America, where all the successful candidate really must have is salient mediocrity, a shameless lust for power, and a willingness to be the creature of pharmaceutical/medical mafia, the petrochemical thieves, and agro-biz land-rapists, and the fundamentalist ochlocrats.

This tyranny of mediocrity, and the fact that candidates are obliged to sell their souls to powerful interests to amass sufficient funds for expensive television campaigns and mass smearing assaults, brings one to the saddening realization that no one who is able to get elected to the presidency of the United States deserves to hold that high office.

*As in reducing the four syllables of ‘terrorism’ to one chewed syllable and a hum: ‘turzm’

53. ‘...the audience cheers him on’ (p. 292)

No American Indian soldiers appeared in these ‘all-American platoons’, notwithstanding the contribution of Navaho signal corpsmen to ‘clear’ radio communications that could be intercepted by enemy listeners, but not decoded. And certainly no Japanese-Americans were included; despite the fact that the Nisei ‘Go for Broke’ regiment was the most decorated unit in the war.

54. ‘...nobody owned a car.’ (p. 292)

Some years after the war, a hustler I met while traveling with the carnivals told me of a delightful scam that sprang up all across the country in the first weeks of gas rationing. (I call it delightful because the scam targeted only cheaters.) It went like this: the con would have a small gas tank installed in his trunk and connected to the engine, then he would block off his car’s gas tank. This done, he would pull into a gas station, his engine coughing and sputtering as though he had just made it on his last drops of gas. (This was effected by pulling out the choke as he turned into the station.) Wiping his

brow with relief, the con would say how lucky he had been to make it on a dry tank, and then he would ask the station owner (the scam worked better on owners than on mere attendants) to fill his tank with water.

“Water!?! Are you out of your mind, buddy?”

The con would good-naturedly admit that possibility, but he would insist on having his tank filled with water.

“Okay, Mister. It’s your ass.”

When the tank was full of water, the con would give the station owner a handsome tip for his service (as much as a quarter, maybe) then he would take a small box out of his pocket, extract a pill from it, drop it into the gas tank and replace the cap, carefully tightening the cap down as he explained that safety obliged him to avoid the ‘effervescent back-spatter of chemical conmixation’. During the ten minutes required for the stuff to do what scientists call ‘work’, he would engage the owner in small talk: the weather, the war, is there any ‘action’ in this town, and hey, had he heard the latest one about the traveling salesman who...

...But the mark’s curiosity and greed always got the best of him, and he would ask about the pills.

Pulling his most solemn face, the con would remind him that their country was at war, and gas was rationed because the boys over there needed every drop they could get to defeat the Nazis and the Nips.

“Yeah, yeah, sure, but what’s the skinny on those pills of yours?”

“I can’t tell you anything about these pills. We’ve taken an oath of secrecy and...well, never mind. I guess I’d better get going. Time is money, like the fella said.”

“Whoa there! Are you trying to tell me that those pills can turn water into gasoline?”

“I’m not trying to tell you anything, friend. In fact, I’ve been instructed to say that these tablets are aspirin. Ordinary, everyday aspirin. I’m sure you understand.”

“Yeah, but...how can a pill turn water into gas?”

“I’m instructed to tell you that it can’t. Well, I’ll see you around. Don’t take any wooden nickels.”

“Wait a minute! Ah...you wouldn’t be willing to sell a couple of those ‘aspirin’, would you? Just so I’d have something in reserve for special customers?”

“I feel for you pal, but I even if I wanted to sell you some of these pills, I couldn’t, because this batch wasn’t developed for sale. We’re just testing them under normal driving conditions. Well, that should be enough time for the mixing process to have...ah...engendered.” With this, the con would return to his car and start up the engine. “Ah, listen to that. The marvels of modern science, eh!” But he wouldn’t drive off. First, he asked if he could use the restroom.

By the time he got back, the service station owner had worked out what he wanted to say. “Look, buddy, tell you what. I’ll give you ten bucks for each of those pills you can spare. Whaddya say? Who’d ever find out? You know *I ain’t* going to tell.”

“Gosh, I’d like to be of service to you, but I’m not sure it’s right to...”

“Ah, come on.”

“Well -I-I, I guess you might say I was just broadening the basis of the test...”

“There you go. That’s all you’d be doing. Broadening your basis. How about it?”

“Well... Let’s get one thing straight from the outset. I am obliged to inform you that these pills are only aspirin. Nothing else. Just ordinary aspirin.”

“Sure, sure. Aspirin. You bet.”

“In fact, they resemble aspirin down to the smallest detail. Take a look.” And the con would show the mark one of the pills with the name of the best-known aspirin manufacturer stamped on it in cruciform. “Do these look like ordinary aspirin, or what? I challenge you to tell the difference.”

The admiring mark would confess that no one could tell the difference.

“Those boys in camouflage know their business. But you better not get them mixed up on your medicine shelf, or your wife might go running down the road at sixty miles an hour.”

“Don’t I wish.”

“Look, I’ve got to cover my backside. If I sell you some of these ‘aspirin’, I’ll need you to sign a paper that says I told you right from the first that these were just ordinary aspirin. I don’t want to lose my job, and they’d be real sore if they found out I’d let you have some of these experimental...ah...aspirin. You see my position, don’t you?”

“Got you. Sure, I’ll sign.”

The con would produce a form stating that he, party of the first part, had sold to Mr (you fill it in), party of the second part, a number of aspirin for sole and only purpose of relieving pain, and that at no time, nor in any way, fashion, or degree had he represented these aspirin to be anything else. The phony legalese wording was intended to dissuade the mark from blowing the whistle and ruining the scam, because he would appear to be a stupid ass if it got out that not only had he been conned into buying magic gasoline pills, but he had even signed a paper *admitting* that he knew all the time that these magic pills were aspirin.

Once the exchange of five aspirin for fifty dollars had been made, and the mark had topped up the tank in his own car with water and dropped in a tablet, the con would say he had to be on his way, but he would remind the mark to give the pill sufficient time to ‘work’ before starting up the engine.

“Right. Ten minutes you said?”

“Hm -m, maybe even fifteen to be on the safe side.”

Safe, of course, for the con, who needed some distance between them.

This scam was good for only a month or so before word of it got around, but in that month it was worked from Maine to California and it accounted for a considerable number of damaged engines, which made work for lots of mechanics, so it was for the general good of the economy in the long run.

During the time I drifted with carnivals, I learned that there are few things so beautiful as the well-run sting; and this one had some of the sweetest characteristics, like telling the mark exactly what he was getting right from the first (aspirin, in this case), and

setting up the scam so that it is the mark who was pursuing and the con who is reluctant and coy.

55. *'...people with mental problems' (p. 295)*

Possessing the state's principal nuttury was not Poughkeepsie's only distinction, nor was being the seat of a noted woman's college. More than a hundred and fifty years ago, Poughkeepsie was chosen for their cough drop factory by the Smith brothers, William and Andrew (but generations of kids thought their first names were 'Mark' and 'Trade' from the words beneath their images on the box). Children of my era felt indebted to these solemn bearded gentlemen because their black licorice discs were the only treat you could get away with sucking in school, except for the rival brand, Luden's, which tasted like hospital corridors smell, but we would suck them in school if that was all we had, because getting away with something was a joy in itself, even if the sucking was a distasteful task.

56. *'...come back safe and well' (p. 297)*

This pious drivel comes from the tobacco industry that has knowingly addicted and ultimately killed hundreds of thousands of people and is today using every underhand ploy to derail the World Health Organization's campaign to save the Third World from the blight of lung cancer and heart disease that is ravaging the post-industrial West.

In the United States tobacco farmers receive generous subsidies, to which we must add the millions of dollars every year that Americans spend in hospital costs as tobacco brings hundreds of thousands of them to early deaths from heart and lung problems. But this murderous industry is well embedded in Congress through the long-serving congressmen from the tobacco belt, and the generosity of its support for presidential candidates is legendary.

We spend much more on supporting the tobacco industry with shadow subsidies than we spend in programs designed to warn our children away from the damage and danger of smoking. Politicians. They're not the kind of people one has to diner.

57. *'...the Castle Walk' (p. 298)*

These last three were invented and popularized by Vernon and Irene Castle, a husband-and-wife team that single-handedly swept America into the great Dance Era preceding the First World War, in which Vernon Castle was killed. One of Mother's most prized possessions was a photograph of them signed by Irene Castle, who left it in lieu of a tip for the month's service she received when she was dining in the restaurant where Mother was her star-struck waitress.

Mother had a theory that names exercised a decisive but unrecognized effect on determining a person's future: that people were either launched or hobbled by their names. How far, she asked, would a man get in the catering trade if his family name was

Schitz? She found support for her theory in the fact that Castle was only a stage name, the couple's real names being Vernon Blythe and Irene Foote. Blithe-Foot, for dancers? What more proof can you want?

58. '*...the clapping, whistling audience*' (p. 298)

The Jackson Strut was a wonderfully ironic non-event full of cocky authority and hollow panache. It was a jaunty stroll across the stage, with a slight point of the toe just before each foot touched the ground accompanied by a downward movement of both clenched fists held before the stomach, as though you were tugging your vest straight, all the while looking out at the audience with an expression of 'ain't I just the greatest thing alive?' Mother had seen the Jackson Strut performed by the vaudeville team Clayton, Jackson and Durante before vaudeville collapsed and Jimmy Durante reinvented himself as the leader of one of the many 'Original Dixieland Jazz Bands' made up of New Yorkers seeking to profit from Black musical traditions. When his band failed, he turned to comedy, first in films and later in neonate television.

59. '*... hits of the 1941-42 season*' (p. 302)

White Christmas, I Don't Want to Walk Without You, There Are Such Things, Deep in the Heart of Texas, My Devotion, I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo, One Dozen Roses, Blues in the Night, Somebody Else is Taking My Place, Sleepy Lagoon, Mister Five by Five, Tangerine, I Had the Craziest Dream, Skylark, Who Wouldn't Love You?, Dearly Beloved, Why Don't You Do Right?, Elmer's Tune, I Remember You, That Old Black Magic, Serenade in Blue, There Will Never Be Another You, Don't Get Around Much Anymore.

I just wasted an hour writing out the lyrics to these songs to prove to myself that I still remembered them. I was appalled to realize that the dark crevasses of my mind are crammed with such trivia when I have trouble remembering what I did yesterday, and what I must do today.

60. '*...Frederick Remington*' (p. 308)

Between them, Owen Wister and Frederick Remington provided America and the world with the proto-myths upon which the Western genre was founded. Wister, a Harvard-educated Philadelphian, wrote the stories that elevated the brutish, illiterate cowboy to a cultural icon of virile independence, earthy philosophy, and a passion for fair play, while Remington, a Yale-educated New York illustrator, created the visual aspects of the Western myth that are often, and wrongly, accredited to such film directors as John Ford and Sergio Leone, who did little more than record Remington's mythotypes and settings on film.

61. *'...hits of 1943' (p. 308)*

Brazil; You'll Never Know; Paper Doll; People Will Say We're in Love; As Time Goes By (which had been written several years earlier by a man with the singularly horrisonant name, Herman Hupfeld, but it rocketed to delayed popularity because of the film, *Casablanca*); Sunday, Monday, or Always; I've Heard that Song Before; Don't Get Around Much Any More; All or Nothing at All; Elmer's Tune; Moonlight Becomes You; You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To; Pistol Packin' Mama; Oh, What a Beautiful Morning; That Old Black Magic; Speak Low; One for my Baby; Do Nothing 'Till You Hear From Me.

62. *'...thrown back into the sea' (p. 315)*

The other four landing beaches were relatively 'soft', but a combination of strong rip tides, awkward terrain, and tenacious defense from fixed emplacements that the pre-landing bombardment had not sufficiently damaged made Omaha an abattoir. Not until the end of the war did we learn that our eventual breakout into the open country of the peninsula was largely due to Hitler's stubborn refusal to release first-rate troops from the Pas de Calais, where he kept them in the belief that the Normandy landings were only a feint to draw troops away from beaches closer to the ultimate destination of Paris.

Victory in Europe (page 317)

63. *'...victory be far away?' (p. 317)*

How long could the bombed-out shell that was Berlin hold out? Unlike the shameful xenophobic excesses on the home front during the First World War, our Anti-German propaganda had not dehumanized the mass of the German people in the way our anti-Japanese propaganda had; and now, in anticipation of the post-war need for a buffer against our nonce allies, the Russians, the American public was being told that we were not fighting the misguided German people, only their evil leaders.

But our propaganda depicted the Japanese, not as victims of a ruthless government, but as sub-human fanatics who were insanely determined to fight on to the last man. In the movies we saw blurred, jerky, hand-held (therefore realistic) newsreels showing our navy off Okinawa meeting a new and terrible weapon: kamikaze raids by pilots eager to sacrifice their lives for country and emperor...proof that they were infinitely more primitive and savage than our brave young boys willing to die for the stars and stripes, Mom, apple pie, and the American Dream. Nor was the kamikaze spirit limited to pilots and planes. On April 6th, the greatest battleship the world will ever know, the seventy-two thousand ton Yamato armed with 18-inch guns, was dispatched with barely enough fuel for the outward leg of a suicidal mission against the American fleet supporting the Okinawa invasion. But, as both the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Battle of Midway had shown at the beginning of the war, the era of the battleship was over. Alone, without escort or air cover, the Yamato was a lumbering target for attacks

by carrier-based dive-bombers and torpedo planes, and it sank on April 7th without having scratched the paint of an American ship. It was obvious that with their cities flattened, their sources of raw materials amputated, and their industry reduced to rubble, the Japanese could not win the war, indeed could not long continue to fight. But we were told that their maniac blend of fatalism and fanaticism made it impossible for them to surrender, so they would have to be slain to the last man, woman, and bloodthirsty child. The necessity of this regrettable course of action was demonstrated when the Japanese unleashed a frightening new variant of the 'divine wind' upon us: the baka-bomb (baka means 'crazy'), which claimed its first victim off Okinawa on April 12th, the destroyer *Abele*. The baka-bomb, a rocket-powered glider full of high explosives was towed into range by an old bomber or cargo plane, then released within sight of the enemy to be guided to its target by its self-immolating pilot. Its rocket engine made it too fast to be swatted out of the sky by curtains of ack-ack, as the majority of the lumbering, out-dated kamikaze planes had been.

64. *'...moments of escape and adventure were behind me' (p. 320)*

My children have given me similar bittersweet moments of letting-go when a word, a gesture, or just the unspoken message behind a glance told me that the child was gone, and I would henceforth be dealing with a young man or woman. From then on, I would have to negotiate with this person differently than as father to child, if I were to continue to be valuable and dear to them. I realized, of course, that this is the natural and necessary way of things, but how sorry I was to lose the child I had held as a baby, naked and rubbery after the bath. I felt intensely sorry for myself that we would never again play the silly games or delight in the devilish teasing and our intricately constructed nonsense worlds. I would no longer be the most important man in their lives.

And I experienced similar pangs of nostalgia for my country one winter when I stood in the slanting light of a feeble late-afternoon sun, alone amongst the grass-grown ruins that had once been a roaring railroad camp, Tie Siding, Wyoming, which I had visited because it would be a locale for a novel in the Western genre. I had to fly out the next morning to return to my home in the Basque country ([see here](#)), and I knew that declining health meant I would never see America again. I have always had a profound pride in the democratic ideals and the common sense institutions born of New England convictions and Virginia spirit, and I have always felt what might be called a geographic patriotism for my country...the florid glory of Vermont sugar bush in fall, the big skies of Wyoming's high plateaus, the lunar sublimity of the Badlands, shadow-waves scudding across seas of yellow grain in Nebraska, the crashing sea off California's north coast, the purple and taupe twilight of a New Mexican desert. Leaving the places where I had lived and worked was painful, but I felt no pangs about leaving aspects of my country that were alien to its origins and to mine: the moral collapse into savage capitalism that marked the entrepreneurial 'Nineties; the stupidity of seeking social equality by lowering the peaks of individual excellence rather than lifting the troughs of mass ignorance that has been the effect, if not the intention, of multi-cultural education; the venomous intellectual

impoverishment of fundamentalism, the energy of which flows from a hatred of others and of otherness; the cold-blooded cynicism of modern politics with its plastic Mac-Kandidates manipulated by spin-doctors and sound-bite merchants and owned body and soul by commercial eco-criminals like the petrochemical combines, commercial thieves like the pharmaceutical industry and commercial murderers like the tobacco companies; the myopic, selfish indifference to the quality of their grandchildren's lives that leads Americans to poison their land with chemical fertilizers, leak atomic waste into their deep rock strata, degrade their air with petrochemical emissions, squander dwindling ground water by creating golf courses in the desert for the superannuated rich, then refusal to join the rest of the world in trying to slow down the damage being inflicted on our planet.

65. '*...just in case.*' (p. 320)

I never used it again. It came with us across the United States to California, only to be left behind when I went north following the apple harvest, never to return...not at a child, anyway. I wonder if the kid who found it...? No, probably not.

Years later, finding myself out of work at the age of 40 and having to make a living with my pen, I wrote a spoof on the derring-do/anti-hero novel which surprisingly, indeed embarrassingly, became a best-seller. My publisher received fan mail asking how Trevanian could write scenes of high adventure with such breathtaking realism and telling detail.

Nothing to it, Honored Reader. Not for a man who has lived through the Battle of Washington Park Hill and still bears the emotional scars.

66. '*...hits of the last year of the war.*' (p. 324)

Most of those songs have fallen from the memory of our mass culture, and I suppose deservedly so on a musical basis, but some of the lyrics were clever or evocative or touching in a way that lyrics stopped being with the arrival of yeah-yeah-yeah rock-'n'-roll or, worse yet, with the virulent anti-music that is rap, with their cultural vandalism, sexist aggression, sub-literate verse, and puerile politics. No one could blame Black Americans if, after having given the world jazz, the most significant music of the Twentieth Century, and finding themselves still treated as cultural and social inferiors, they decided to get even by crapping the anti-music of rap upon us. All right, all right, I understand. But now we're even, right?

The mere mention of a popular song title can evoke an era with more piquancy than any amount of descriptive writing, and this is why I have here and there dusted these pages with song titles, although I realize that only the oldest of my readers will experience the sudden inrush of memories that these old songs can summon. For me, the hits of 1944 instantly recall the three of us sitting around that kitchen table, singing late into the night:

I'll Be Seeing You; Long Ago and Far Away; Besame Mucho; Don't Fence Me In; Mairsy Doats and Dozy Doats and Little Lamsey Divy (I had to look up the capricious

spelling); Dance with a Dolly (...with a hole in her stocking); I Couldn't Sleep a Wink Last Night; Swinging on a Star; Is You Is or Is You Ain't My Baby?; I'm Making Believe; It Had to be You; I'm Confessin' (...that I love you); I'll Get By; I'm Beginning to See the Light; Sentimental Journey; Moonlight in Vermont; Every Time We Say Good-bye.

67. '*...hadn't quite understood it*' (p. 328)

My children might tell you that I have inherited that trait, but that's only because they don't quite understand.

Our Ship Comes In (page 347)

68. '*...budding young socialist*' (p. 349)

The most recent illustration of capitalism's institutional depravity came in the aftermath of the assault the World Trade Center by fanatics of Al Qaeda. It was widely assumed that the leaders of Big Business who had financed America's minority president's campaign and were already benefiting from congenial legislation wouldn't let America down in her time of need. Surely they would step in and protect her economy.

What they actually did was to grasp the opportunity to 'rationalize' their operations, lay off workers, and demand compensation and support from the taxpayers. Then came revelations of the duplicity of leaders major American corporations who had cooked their books to produce false profits, invaded workers' retirement funds, and avoided paying their taxes. And when they knew they were nearing discovery, they quickly sold off their stock in their own companies, reaping fortunes, and leaving their workers destitute

Other corrupt corporations and individuals took this opportunity to confess their villainy on the speculation that they might avoid punishment in the anonymity of general chaos. These companies included banks that had pushed paper they knew to be weak, and accountancy firms that had concealed the fraud and profited from it.

The wounds inflicted on the nation's economy and reputation by these capitalist swindlers were more damaging and long-lasting than the wounds inflicted by bin Laden's fanatical henchmen, yet, although the presidents and chairmen of the guilty firms have thrown some lower-ranked men off the troika to slow down the pursuing wolves, none of them has done a day in prison at the time of this writing, nor are they likely to be adequately punished, because they have friends and soul-brothers in high places, people who believe that everything that is not illegal in a narrowest possible reading of the law is permissible. In this, they reflect the views of our minority president, who might himself have been prosecuted for similar shenanigans if the investigator who was appointed by his father, hadn't declared the evidence to be 'insufficient'.

69. '*...not yet fifty*' (p. 359)

I was luckier than Ben where it came to alcohol. After much foolishness and a few downright disasters, I learned that I must not drink. I didn't drink often or regularly; my problem with alcohol took the form of drinking too much on those occasions when I did drink, and of losing control over the low-grade background rage that is my major source of creative energy. This inability to handle alcohol extends throughout my mother's family. We share with many who have Indian blood an emotional (perhaps also a chemical) frailty that obliged me to avoid anything that could alter my state of consciousness. There are, no doubt, Indians and part-bloods who can drink in moderation, but not many. After small pox and Christianity, the most corrosive thing the European exposed the Indian to was hooch, with its cheap and easy escape from reality and responsibility.

A lethal attraction to states of altered reality was general among Indians of both North and South America long before the arrival of the White. From the earliest times, the search for Elsewhere and Otherwise drove Indians to scour their environment for substances that offered psychic transport. They used everything from tobacco-juice enemas to magic mushrooms, from hemp to coca leaves, from spineless cactus to ayahuasca, the Peruvian vision-vine that gave the Incas and their epigenous descendants visions of flying like giant condors...not flights to another place, but into another state of being. And when there were no hallucinogenic substances at hand, Indians fell back on the reality-warping methods of their Mongolian progenitors, dancing for hour upon hour, jumping and twirling to those repetitive, hypnotic rhythms that erode the bonds of here and now and release the dancer into Elsewhere and Forever.

I worry about taking advantage of treaty rights to set up gambling casinos in the midst of the White population. I am not speaking of the obvious dangers of letting slimy lawyers and third-generation Mafiosi come into contact with vulnerable young people, nor of the shameful greed of those tribal leaders who "brown bag" most of the Indians' share of the profits. And I understand the retributive pleasure an angry people can take in paying back the European for exposing their ancestors to alcohol by subjecting the White, in turn, to his own kind of addiction: the lust for money and possessions. But to bring young Indian males into close and frequent contact with alcohol, drugs, danger, and easy money is patently foolish and ultimately suicidal. The elders know better, but they're blinded by greed.

70. '*...wouldn't bruise our hipbones.*' (p. 364)

When, eventually, I read George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, I couldn't fail to notice (and to feel a certain resentment about) the similarities in our Parisian experiences. But I told myself I was keeping good company, because Orwell had become one of my socialist heroes when I read *The Road to the Wigan Pier*. But my admiration for Orwell dimmed when I learned that, unlike me, he hadn't really been down and out. He'd had the support of the middle-class parents who sent him to good schools, and who were always ready to bail him out when he was on one of his experience-seeking

journeys into the lives and ambiances of the poor...as they bailed him out from Paris, sending him money to come home when things got rough. I confess to the inverse snobbism that the escaped poor often feel towards the middle-class liberal, and particularly those liberals he finds fishing in his pond.



CODA

I have learned that love is absolute and unquantifiable. The person who asks 'How much do you love me?' or the child who says 'You love my brother more than you love me.' misapprehends the nature of love. It isn't that each person possesses a finite quantity of love to be apportioned among those he loves. The love a man feels for his life-mate, or for one of his children, is not diminished by the love he feels for another of his children, or for a brother, or an old friend. It is as though there were a separate space in one's heart for each beloved person, and that space is brim-full of love. When another child is born, a new pocket of love opens in the heart devoted fully and solely to that child. There is only one way to love...fully.

After I die, the love I have for my wife and children and grandchild and those whom they love will continue on. When they need me, when they are frightened or overburdened, I shall be there, just out of sight around the corner of time, and they will feel my presence with the same inexplicable certitude that one feels the eyes of a watcher in a crowd. I shall always be there when they want me, and never be there when they don't. I shall console them and fortify them with hope and with the certain knowledge that they are loved.

In addition, old carnival con that I am, I shall find ways to intercede on their behalf. Using the camouflage of circumstance, coincidence, luck and accident, I shall advance their projects as I befuddle and thwart those of their opponents and ill wishers, or of those who are simply inadvertent obstacles.

When, full of years and love, my wife joins me, our essences will commingle, and united we shall watch over our loved ones, sending them peace and hope, cosseting and loving them, listening to them when they wish to share anything into the darkness over their beds. And after the last of my children dies...only a moment in the cosmic flow of time...and they in turn are watching over and supporting their beloved ones from beyond place and time; the commingled swirl of essence that is my wife and I will enfold any of our children who want to come with us, and we shall cease to exist...except for one another.

There is no heaven in my vision of eternity; no mythology, no gods, no rewards, no punishments. There is only love.



Novels by Trevanian

[The Eiger Sanction](#)

[The Loo Sanction](#)

[The Main](#)

[The Summer of Katya](#)

[Shibumi](#)

[Incident at 20-Mile](#)

[The CrazyLadies of Pearl Street.](#)

Short Story Collection

[Hot Night in the City \(short stories\)](#)

Comedies (as Nicholas Searle)

[1339: An apology for a Pedlar](#)

[Rude Tales and Glorious](#)

Biographical notes and more can be found here: <http://www.trevanian.com/tdesk/tbio.htm>

ISBN 0-9544831-1-1

