

Robert's Summa Theologica

Robert Markland Smith

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To Bonnie McLean

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FRAGMENTS OF A PREFACE

The following texts and scribblings by Robert M. Smith are leftovers after a life of feasting on the fruits of madness and grieving. Vultures have devoured the main parts of the meal, and we have a few incoherent pages which I present here as a testimony of values forgotten and stories from antiquity.

Robert was sometimes brilliant but more often than not, insane. He could go into rages, screaming around the house trying to maintain order among the rest of us, who laughed at these antics.

Early in his life, the authorities got hold of him and forced him to take medication. So he twitched through the crowds, looking silly but serious. A bit like Quasimodo, he rang the bells to warn us about imminent catastrophe, which never materialised.

So here are some of his writings, old and new. Take it all with a grain of salt.

The man suffered and was never taken seriously. Maybe you will find some truths in these pages. As it is written, “Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

November 6, 2016





1 ÜBERMENSCH

Last Saturday, I was telling Bonnie, my wife, about Lord Byron, while we drove back to Montreal. I had read the biography by André Maurois while I was studying literature at Loyola College many years ago. There is a scene in which Byron is recently married; it is nighttime, and his newlywed wife is in bed, trying to sleep, while there is a fire burning in the fireplace and the maniac poet is stoned on opium, holding a skull in one hand and a pistol in the other, ranting diabolically as he keeps threatening his wife. You can imagine

the shadows dancing on the walls and the ceiling, to the rhythm of the flames gyrating on the embers. And Bonnie asked me why I was fascinated with Lord Byron, when he was such a blatant scoundrel. I replied, "Because he was a brilliant writer..." For instance, in his one-act play *Manfred*, the hero is in a dark castle on top of a cliff, during a thunderstorm in the Alps, and he is tormented because he has a dark secret. Byron's secret was his incest. He got engaged to marry a woman who was, according to him, "mathematical," so on his wedding night, instead of sleeping with his wife and consummating his marriage, he slept with his half-sister. For this crime against nature, he was exiled from England and spent the rest of his life on the continent.

Bonnie wondered why such depraved individuals reach such prominence. We were debating this, while driving along the highway. I mentioned the myth of Faustus and the

medieval interpretation of fame and fortune – people used to believe that if you sold your soul to the devil, he would give you fame and fortune. Anyway, the Faustus of Marlowe and Goethe believed this and was of course betrayed, because why would the devil keep a promise?

I was saying there are other reasons why some evil people become bigger than life. Sometimes they happen to be very creative individuals and land in favourable circumstances. I have always felt that it is like shouting in the Grand Canyon: if you are exactly in the right place, the echo of your voice will resonate louder and louder. Cathedrals and concert halls are designed to have similar acoustics, aren't they? Bonnie agreed. She said some writers or politicians or painters simply have a lot of talent. However, I replied, some very talented people wrote brilliantly but had never been recognized. Other times, there are mediocre writers like John

Masefield who become poet laureates. Then, Bonnie and I discussed artists, especially actors, who are thrown into the limelight because of their promoters. What about Elvis or Marilyn Monroe, who made it very big, were driven by their agents, and came to a tragic end? "The bigger they are," I said, "the harder they fall."

Bonnie didn't agree with this. She doesn't believe there is any poetic justice involved in tragedies like those. And she certainly doesn't believe the devil or a god grants fame or fortune to individuals they favour. She thought it is entirely up to the artist or politician or public figure. She believed some people are clever manipulators and use people in their surroundings to express their message. She also thought some artists or writers can capture the spirit of their times better than others, like Obama. I replied that others still are discovered only centuries later, like William Blake. And the debate went on, as the

windshield wipers slashed back and forth during the storm along the highway.

On the other hand, I told Bonnie, there are also clever manipulators like Hitler, who seize opportunities to suit their own ambition. I remember reading in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, how Hitler seemed driven to do impulsive things which served his own evil ends. And yet, he had an agenda, which he described in *Meinkampf*. And he also came to a disgraceful end. I tried to explain to Bonnie that he had been an antichrist, but she didn't buy this biblical interpretation.

Bonnie had just taken a course in Greek mythology at Concordia, and told me that in antiquity, the common interpretation was hybris and nemesis. Some individual, such as Hitler, would exalt himself, raise himself up to the status of the gods; consequently the gods would crush that person and put him back in his place. The first process

was arrogance, or hybris. The tragic end of these kings would be nemesis.

I replied that there was the same concept in the Bible. King Nebuchednazzar thought he was a god; therefore, Jehovah drove him mad, so that he left civilization, grew long hair and ate grass, like cattle. That was his nemesis.

Once again, Bonnie is not a believer. Neither in the Greek gods, nor in the god of the Bible. Nor does she believe in fate. She thinks everything in the universe runs on chance or randomness. Her interpretation is that ambitious people make it to the top, that hard work will make you rich, that talent is always rewarded. She doesn't like it when I quote Ecclesiastes – *the race is not to the swift, nor battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding, nor bread to the wise, nor favour to men of skill...* That contradicts her whole ethic. And yet, I remind her, most people get rewards for their efforts, but then again, some

people like Leonard Cohen acquire so much fame and acclaim that mere talent doesn't explain it. In Montreal newspapers, Leonard can do no wrong. He is a *vedette*, a super star. The newspaper articles never discuss his ideas. They discuss the scarf and the coat he was wearing at Irving Layton's funeral. If fame and recognition are a creation of the media, how does that explain the fame of people in antiquity, like Jesus Christ or Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great?

Bonnie replies that in a book she read, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, the author seemed to say that some people aim higher than mere survival. Their spirit soars and tries to fly higher and higher, while other creatures merely try to eke out a living. Didn't William Blake say, "No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings?"

And then I replied that some artists exploit others for their own ends. These are very successful people in their own

fields. They get reviews in the press, favourable critiques on the web, some of them even have their names up in lights. But they are predators. They will arrive at the scene of an accident and take photographs or write a story, rather than call for help. They have an instinct for the right moment, they catch you when you are down and out. They photograph, write about or paint suffering people. Their art depicts individuals who are handicapped, drunks, people with mental disabilities, people on medication. They love their subjects, all right. They love them so much that they make money off them. While the subjects of their movies and photos continue suffering on welfare, the artists get awards and praise and money.

I added that for the longest time, you wonder if these artists are angels or demons. When Ernest Hemingway described the character Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises*, was he getting

revenge? What were his motives as he was writing? The novel begins with a five page description of a person the author obviously hated. Yes, Hemingway appeared to be bigger than life, but was he a hero or a villain? When Shakespeare created the character Shylock, was the Bard simply being a predator or an exploiter?

Bonnie wouldn't answer that question. Not believing in angels or demons, she thinks people are just people. She has worked most of her life and never took time to trip out, to explore the depths of evil or meditate on the heights of goodness. And she is right. If you are going to fathom God or Satan, you need spare time. You need time to read books and travel; this means the average person doesn't know what these predator artists are up to, what they are doing in their spare time – are they reading other writers and other scriptures? Are they conjuring up spirits and making deals with them? For that

matter, how do cloistered monks and nuns spend their time?

She went on: is there something holy or compassionate about photographing handicapped people, like some do? Is there a guru that actually means something to these famous photographers? They always have a camera in your face. Do you know where they are going to show your picture? Are they benefactors or exploiters?

I told Bonnie someone told me a story by email. This person was supposed to meet some artist friends for some quiet time eating pizza on Saint Lawrence Street. Instead, they showed up and shoved a camera in her face and then broadcast the video on You Tube.

But this doesn't explain how famous people reach prominence, does it? What explains their success? Is it hard work? Is it luck? Is it their sense of timing? Is it talent? (Bonnie and I disagreed.)

I explained to her that incidentally, the late Graham McKeen once said to me on the phone, "You know, Smitty, you and I have something in common. It's a good thing we are not famous. Because we couldn't handle it." I said I was no better than anyone else. Fame was simply never given to me.

I may have wished at one time I had more recognition, but today I realize I am just another ordinary person, a mediocre writer and I wouldn't want to be famous anyway.

As we were pulling up to our apartment building in Montreal in the rain, I added I was just curious why *the Babylonian lottery*, as Luis Borges called it, bestowed fame and fortune beyond measure to some people and ignominy to others, and to most people like myself, anonymity. And at the end of his short story, Borges admits the lottery run by the high priests of Babylon had the power of God, to make one man a leader, another man a prisoner, another

man a labourer, one man a family man,
and another man a drunk. The wheel of
fortune spins around, like in *Carmina
Burana*, and we all end up equal in death.
We are all born naked. We will all
appear in judgment. Then Thoth reads
our record of good and bad deeds
before the judge.

Bonnie pursed her lips and gave me
her usual look of doubt.

May 18, 2009

2 THE WHOLE WORLD IN HIS HANDS

Last night, I understood the meaning of life. Boing. Just like that.

This is how it happened. Our twenty-one year old daughter Isabelle had the car for the evening. She had to work at the Collège de Montréal and it was agreed she would be back with the car by 11:00 o'clock. The reason she was supposed to be back at that time was that her sister Cordelia was invited to a party on Sainte-Catherine Street and my girlfriend and I were supposed to drive her there. We had agreed with Cordelia we would leave at 11:00. So we waited.

Eleven o'clock rolled around and we waited some more. I was starting to get impatient. I was fuming in fact. I was telling myself that Isabelle wasn't getting the car all weekend. We kept phoning her and texting her and there was no answer. Finally she texted back that she had gone out for supper with her boyfriend Shayne and she would be back soon. And I am waiting and I am angry.

At long last, Isabelle shows up with the car at 11:40 p.m. She has her boyfriend and her boyfriend's dogs in the car with her. Now we know the landlord doesn't want dogs in our apartment, but we don't fuss. As Cordelia is getting into the car, so we can drive her to her appointment, a few sharp words are exchanged because Cordelia borrowed Isabelle's jacket. OK the dogs are cute. They are two Doberman puppies six weeks old that Isabelle and Shayne bought two weeks

ago. But they are not allowed in our apartment.

So we leave anyway. Cordelia's party is at La Cage aux sports near Sherbrooke and Atwater. Those are the only directions Cordelia gives us. We drive down one street and Cordelia says we have to go back home because she forgot her I.D. and her house keys. So we try to drive back and come up Earncliffe from Monkland and the street is blocked because a tree has fallen in yesterday's wind storm. So Bonnie turns the car around with great difficulty on a narrow one-way street and we drive the wrong way down back to Monkland Avenue. Finally, we make it to our house. Cordelia gets out of the car, runs to the house and runs back to the car a minute later – and we take off. We are driving up The Boulevard in Westmount and keep getting red lights. I tell Bonnie, "It seems the gods are not with us..." I am not too happy with things. It is midnight and my daughter is

going out for a drink and we don't know where she is going.

OK, we pull down Atwater and turn left on Sainte-Catherine. We go past the AMC Forum and suddenly, like a revelation, after all this frustration, despite all odds – Cordelia screams out, “Stop the car! There are Lauren and my friends on the sidewalk!” They were walking towards the bar -- they hadn't gotten there yet – if we had got there at 11:30 as we planned, her friends wouldn't have been there yet – the timing is just perfect!!

Cordelia gets out of the car, her friend James gives her a big hug, and there is Cordelia with four or five of her buddies, and everything worked out! And it occurs to me a few minutes later that maybe the whole universe is like that. We struggle, we suffer, we encounter opposition and contradiction, we create drama, -- and we don't know it, but we are right on time!

November 2, 2013

3 THE GLITTERING PLEASURE DOME

*“Mathilda’s the defendant,
She killed by the hundreds...”*

(Tom Traubert’s Blues, by Tom Waits)

*“For all nations have drunk of the wine of the
wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the
earth have committed fornication with her, and
the merchants of the earth are waxed rich
through the abundance of her delicacies.”*

(Revelations 18:3)

The barker cries out, for all to hear
along the street, “Step right up, folks!

Come and see the wonders of the world! We have got women who strip down and turn you into animals, like Circe of old! We have got freaks who can recite poetry inspired by the devils and evil spirits of Babylon! Step right up, men, women, children, it's the greatest show on earth!" And the lights behind him are flashing, strobe lights roam up and down the strip, and there are wild jazz saxophones screeching. The young children walk up to the barker, and stare at him in bewilderment. He continues, "We've got Barbie dolls for you kids, and depraved Disney videos with happy endings for all of you! You, son, come up front here." And one little boy with stars in his eyes approaches the snake oil salesman.

"Yes, sir," he whispers, his tongue hanging out of his rosy lips.

"Son, tell me," the barker howls into his microphone. "Do you like war? Do you like blood and guts and gore?"

“Yessir,” the little boy’s eyes light up with an evil glare.

“Well, we have got computer games in which real soldiers shoot real bullets at real peasants, and it is all yours for a few pennies a minute. So step right in, son!” And the little boy walks in, enticed. He enters the giant arcade, with the sirens whistling, and the lewd pictures of women in bikinis, and his mother cries after the little boy, but he is lost in a maze of demonic children.

There is now a crowd of spectators approaching. The barker is on fire from hell, and he is yelling now: “Who wants a sports car that shoots bullets like James Bond’s vehicle? Who wants a Batmobile that can fly through a building as impregnable as the World Trade Center? You sir, you look like you are eager to kick ass!”

And another young man pays his ticket to the doorman, and disappears from the street into the glittering front door of the night club. His girlfriend is

in shock, to lose her lover to such cheap attractions and cheap thrills.

Now the barker carries on, and he does a little dance around his white cane. He is wearing a glowing green bow tie, and waving around a top hat with the American flag on it. He spots a young girl out of the crowd. He grabs her attention and she is mesmerized. “You, there! Would you like men to worship the ground you walk on? Would you like to be as famous and sexy as Madonna?” Her eyes light up and a smile stretches across her face, like a snake wrapping itself around her head. The barker continues: “Well, we have just the fashions for you! We have see-through blouses and skin-tight pants! Plus we have spiked heels that will make you look like a tramp! Hey, don’t pass up this opportunity, step right up and pay the doorman. Ladies’ night will be tomorrow night, so pay right up!” And the teenage girl just can’t resist, because they haven’t taught her

that in her school. She flows into the arcade, hissing like a boa constrictor. We never see her again.

“Finally, ladies and gentlemen, who wants to get rich quickly? Hey, we have internet sales in the billions of dollars, we have bogus prospectuses, insider trading, and you can even become politicians! You sir, wouldn't you like to sway the masses with your winning smile? Would you like to be a show-business star and run the government? Step right up!!” And one more young lawyer disappears into the babylonian arcade, never to reappear until he is recycled into one of the devil's disciples.

However, there is a homeless person in the crowd, a penniless hobo who wanders up and asks the barker, “What about me? Can I get in there? I haven't got the money to pay admission, but you can have my soul, buddy...”

But the crowd has now dissolved, and the doors to the night club are closing. The barker gives the homeless

man a look of disdain and scorn, and states, for all to hear: “No, sir, here we only take cash or credit cards. We are not interested in your two-bit soul. Besides, the door is closing. We are not taking any more pleasure seekers tonight. Go to the Salvation Army, buddy, go to the mission and try to get a bed for the night. We are not a charity organization here. Besides, old man, the last shall be first and the first shall be last, haha.”

The door closes. The barker has gone indoors. Suddenly, we can't hear the music; the flashing lights have abated. It is dark and silent on the main street. It can be Sainte-Catherine Street in Montreal, it can be somewhere in Soho, in London; it can be in Greenwich Village, in New York. The lights are out, and the homeless person walks away, wondering what he is missing. He stumbles, because he has a bad leg. He searches through a garbage can, looking for a sandwich, and then

finds a lit cigarette butt on the sidewalk. He glances back at the magic-theater night club, and then continues on his way, limping into the night.

The shadows swallow him up and cover him like a protective mantle. He disappears into an alley and we can't see him anymore. *Fade.*

December 25, 2003

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4 THE MAN WHO FELL ASLEEP

I guess the worst thing you can do is to fall asleep during a movie and remain asleep while they lock the doors of the theater after hours.

A few years ago, I had moved into a flat near the Main, in Montreal, to live close to some friends of mine. There were several college friends of mine living on Saint Lawrence and the neighbouring streets. The neighbourhood was a haven of creativity, as there were poets, and potters, and painters living among the immigrant Portuguese community. We were all bohemians. We drank at La

Cabane, and the Bar Saint-Laurent. Some people even did drugs. The local downtown people, who spoke Portuguese among themselves, did not mix with us very much. There were Jewish people of European extraction – for instance, there was a Hebrew tombstone factory, and a couple of smoked meat places like Schwartz's and The Main.

One night, I was in one of these smoked meat delis when a gentleman caught my attention. He didn't look like he fit in, but he nodded at me. We both finished our meal and stepped out into the cool November night at the same time. I asked him, "Going my way?" and we started talking. I brought him to my apartment, and he went to some lengths to dissuade me from living in the Plateau.

"Listen, you really should move out of this neighbourhood. It is not wholesome. These restaurants and bars are all dens of sin. There is corruption

around every corner here, and if you want to save your immortal soul, escape!”

He went on to tell me he KNEW. He was a seminarian, studying for the priesthood. And he was very concerned about my soul. The writing was on the wall – leave this evil neighbourhood immediately.

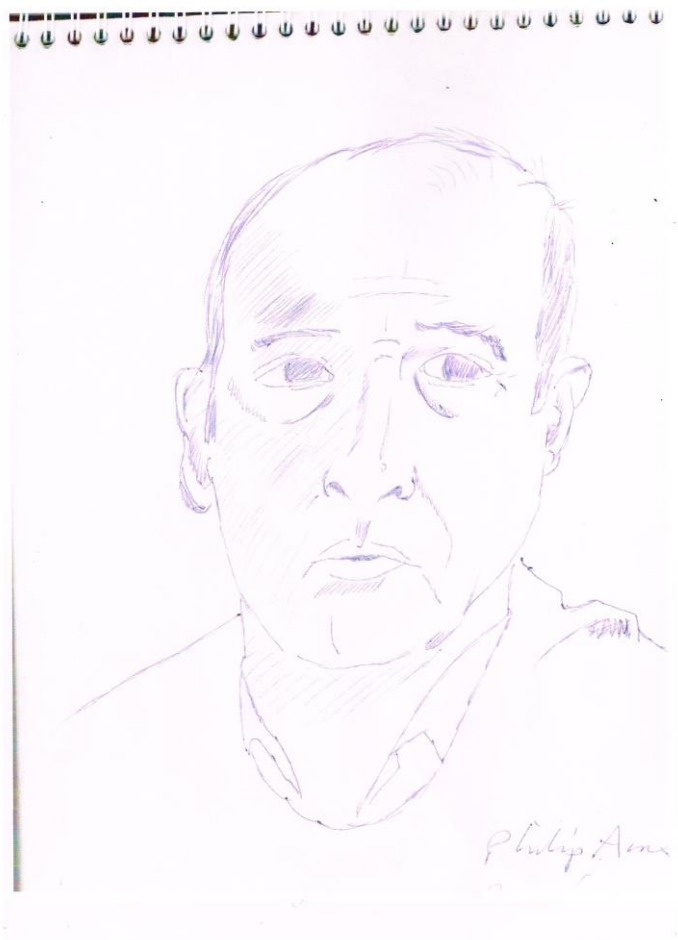
I didn't take it seriously. Until one night, about a month later. I was walking home from a friend's house, when I had to walk past the Cinéma L'Amour, along Saint Lawrence Boulevard. This was the local porno theater. The wares were advertised at the front door. Naked women, semi-dressed women, topless women. It was certainly decadent.

However, I cracked up laughing, as I walked past the theater, at halfpast midnight. Because there was the seminarian, locked behind the big glass doors of the cinema, trapped and caught with his pants down. He looked

desperate as he saw me, obviously pleading for help. He looked a bit frumpy, as though he had been sleeping a lot after hours...

January 8, 2012





5 ILLUMINATION, POINT D'INTERROGATION

*Lancer un câble à l'étoile dans la nuit
Tête hors de l'eau, vers quelque chose hors d'ici.*
(Félix Leclerc, Comme Abraham)

*À vendre les Corps sans prix, hors de toute
race, de tout monde, de tout sexe, de toute
descendance ! Les richesses jaillissant à chaque
démarche ! Solde de diamants sans contrôle !*
(Arthur Rimbaud, Solde)

Imaginez un roman sur la quête de l'absolu, de l'infini. Il s'agirait de l'histoire d'un jeune bourgeois insatisfait de l'idéal matérialiste que lui propose

son milieu. Chez ses parents il habite une maison modèle de luxe pourri et il veut mieux que ça. Un jour il aperçoit des vagabonds qui semblent heureux, et il part à l'aventure; il fait très peu de valises et sort son pouce. Il se dirige vers l'autoroute et il est parti.

Pour ceux qui l'entouraient, il semble disparu. Il efface toute trace de son départ et brouille les pistes qui permettraient de le retrouver et de le réapprivoiser.

Un soir le long de la route, deux heures avant l'aube, il voit les splendeurs inouïes du ciel qui prépare le lever du soleil. Les jaunes suivent les verts, les mauves suivent le rose. Le jeune homme entend les crapauds et les cigales qui se mettent à célébrer le début du jour. Et il a désormais une mission : découvrir la Ville dans le ciel dont l'architecte et le bâtisseur est divin. Comme Abraham, il lance un câble à l'étoile dans la nuit et cherche son chemin à l'aveuglette

d'abord; puis il aperçoit des signes révélateurs qui le guident vers son but.

Voici qu'il rencontre d'autres vagabonds. Des chercheurs de l'absolu, à leur façon. Des voyageurs et des coureurs des bois. Il croise des autochtones qui lui inspirent leur vision du monde.

Parfois, il affronte des obstacles insurmontables. La police le recherche, car il est porté disparu. Ses parents ont retenu les services des autorités pour le ramener de force au bercail. Le jeune homme doit se cacher et changer son apparence; il se déguise et passe inaperçu à travers les villes.

Dans la forêt qui longe la route, il a faim. Les tentations l'approchent. Les voix qu'il entend lui suggèrent de renoncer à son projet et de retourner au confort et au luxe.

Il persévère.

Entre-temps il y a les merveilles de la forêt, de la route, de coucher à la belle étoile, sans souci. La pluie. La neige. Les

cerfs. Les renards. Les loups. Les champignons. Les herbages divers. Et toujours le ciel qui fascine notre héros.

Mais voici que la police lui tend une embuscade. Il est arrêté. On le place dans une asile pour les fous dangereux. On le reconduit à l'asile, dans la grande ville. On le force à prendre des médicaments et on lui promet un succès stupide parmi des êtres stupides qui vivent dans la stupeur. On le fait travailler dans un bureau où il doit se dissimuler et camoufler ses sentiments anarchistes parmi les somnambules.

Découragé, il se met à fréquenter des putes et des trafiquants de drogue, des gens de la rue à qui il prêche l'absolu et la liberté. Certains l'écoutent. Personne ne veut renoncer à son vice.

Il est coïncé dans les rouages de la civilisation et il s'empoisonne. Toutefois, en train de mourir à l'hôpital, il remarque les infirmiers et infirmières qui s'occupent des patients et il comprend quelque chose. Le sens de la

vie, c'est rendre service aux autres. Viser un absolu dans le désert est une préoccupation purement égoïste. Il faut vivre pour servir les autres.

Mais c'est trop tard et les funérailles sont trompeuses et mensongères. On blâme tout sur des mauvais compagnons et des mauvaises lectures.

Une fois qu'il est enterré, on entend les corbeaux croasser par-dessus sa tombe. Quelque part, un enfant chante dans la nuit.

Le 13 janvier 2016

6 MISTER PAGE

In the days when I used to go to church, there was a handicapped fellow called Jean-Claude Pagé who used to attend all the charismatic prayer meetings at St. Augustine's Church, in NDG. I felt sorry for the poor man, because he walked on crutches. Actually, he was about six foot five, and rather dragged his legs along behind him. It would take him half an hour to walk a city block. And once I befriended this man, who was in his thirties, I realized he was severely mentally handicapped as well. The reason was that when he was five years old, a young French Canadian boy

had hit him in the back of the head with a baseball bat. So his development remained at the emotional and mental level of a five year old.

So far so good. I began taking this gentleman out for dinner in restaurants, trying to be a Good Samaritan or something. And poor Jean-Claude would walk into a restaurant and say to me, in his slow, retarded drawl, "Let's sit beside the pretty girls over there." So we would sit at the booth across from whatever ladies were in the restaurant, and in a flash, Jean-Claude would reach out his hand for a handshake and ask the women, "Hi, I'm Mister Page, I am from St. Augustine, can I get in touch with you?" And then he would pull out his little black address book, and copy down all their phone numbers. Here is what he did with their phone numbers: one night, having my number, he phones me up at 3 :00 in the morning, and drawls out to me, while I am half asleep, "Hi, it's Jean-Claude. I guess I

shouldn't be so down. I am feeling lonely." And you couldn't just hang up on the guy, because you knew full well he had a mental impediment. So you would listen to his complaining and moaning for an hour or two, while you were losing your beauty sleep.

So, this went on for several months. I would regularly meet Jean-Claude at the prayer meeting on Saturday afternoons, and take him out for supper, and then I began taking him out to movies. To the point that he began counting on it, and expecting it. For instance, we went to see *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and in the darkness of the movie theatre, I turned to glance at Jean-Claude, and there he was, sucking his thumb while totally absorbed in the movie. Now, after a few months of this, one Saturday I tried something different. Because I really felt he was taking advantage of me. So we met at the prayer meeting, had supper and then he asked me, with an innocent,

little-kid look in his eye, "Now we go see a movie, eh?" I replied, "All right, Jean-Claude, we go see a movie. If you pay." So Jean-Claude thinks and thinks this over, for about three minutes, and then he blurts out, joyfully, "Maybe we can watch television!!!" (So he may have been retarded, but he was not crazy.)

And I would bump into him on the 105 bus going towards NDG, which back then was a mainly English neighbourhood. I would say, "Hi, Jean-Claude. Where are you going?" And he would raise a fist and yell, "NDG, TA-DAA!!" Remember, he had been hit in the head by a French-speaking person.

Of course, he had strange opinions, like he wanted to nuke the Russians, for instance. And one day he came to my parents' place and he used the washroom. As he was walking into the bathroom, he mumbled, "And now, French toilet." And when he walked out, I saw what he meant. He had shit all over the floor, and rubbed his poop

on the walls. But you couldn't get angry, because Jean-Claude was Jean-Claude, and everybody loved Jean-Claude. When he first met my mother, who was around seventy then, he jumped on her and kissed her on the neck for all of five minutes. She was in a panic, and my parents decided I could never, ever bring him into our house again.

Of course, at St. Augustine's, he had all the girls' phone numbers, and he phoned them regularly in the middle of the night. So the priest confiscated his little black book. (This is what I was told by several members of the congregation.) So the next time I bumped into Jean-Claude, in the entrance of the McGill metro station, he is in a wheelchair, he lifts up his fist and with a goddawful smile, and blurts out, "NO MORE CATHOLIC!! TODAY ANGLICAN!! TADAA!!" And then he broke out in hysterics, guffawing at his own joke.

After that I never bumped into Jean-Claude again. I guess to some extent, he realized that he could benefit from his handicap. But I am sure he had his ticket to heaven. After all, he went to church, right?

September 29, 1998

7 RESPITE FROM THE MADHOUSE

Right after the October crisis, in 1970, the authorities considered discharging me from Burgess pavilion in the Douglas Psychiatric Center. I was given a weekend pass and spent a couple of days at my friend's country place, where his retired parents lived.

His dad loved to tease and made a permanent impression on me. He had been a prominent and successful businessman, even though he was raised in Saint Henri, and loved to see young people around the house. He and his wife had raised several children and also

adopted a few more. I remember he spent a lot of time listening to BBC News on his shortwave radio and smoking cigarettes and having a beer. What struck me was the way he stacked up his cigarette butts in pyramids after smoking them. As for the beer, he never got drunk and just enjoyed poking them back.

He had bulging eyes and looked a bit like a wise old owl.

The first time I went out there was in November that year and just before I left, he said to me, with a twinkle in his eye, “Smithy, my boy, remember now: you’re always welcome at our house. Because Smithy, my boy, you’re a good boy, and there is not an ounce of hatred in your heart. So Smithy, just remember, you’re ALWAYS welcome at our house. You’ve been prayed for in this house, and that’s why, Smithy, my boy, you’re always welcome at our house.” By now, I was starting to get annoyed and let me mention I was on a high dose of

largactyl, which is a neuroleptic medication that freezes your brain and practically paralyzes you; but the old man continued, “Yes, Smithy, you’re always welcome at our house. Because I can tell, Smithy, that you’re a good boy. There is not an ounce of hatred in your heart, and you’ve been prayed for in this house. So Smithy, my boy, YOU’RE ALWAYS WELCOME at our house...” Mind you, I felt like strangling him at this point, and would have done anything to get him to shut up, as I was dancing on one leg and the other, shuffling back and forth on largactyl. “Now, Smithy, my boy,” he went on, “let me tell you something. You’re always welcome at our house. Because, Smithy, we can tell you’re a good boy. So you’re always welcome at our house...”

This speech went on for half an hour, and at the end I was exasperated, which was what the tease was attempting to do. The old gentleman

went on and on, sitting down, as I danced around in front of him. I was ill-equipped to deal with teasing, much less impatience, but I just stood there, listening, as my friend's father continued: "Smithy, my boy, you're always welcome at our house..."

One time, during that weekend, I had woken up early, around five in the a.m., and my friend's dad was still up, after drinking all night. He walked into the dining room, and asked me, "Smithy, do you know the difference between pleasure and joy?" And he smiled as he cut a fart that must have lasted a minute. And then he exclaimed, "Smithy, THAT is pure joy!"

However I was told he never drank on Saturday nights, because he went to mass on Sunday mornings. And when his wife passed away, he stopped drinking. He took the pledge and put a plug on the jug.

I also went to his funeral and today whenever I see his son, I notice a

distinct resemblance. The same posture, the same humour and the same look.

These are moments I can't forget, as I reach the same age my friend's parents were back then. It was forty-five years ago, but it could have been yesterday.

March 19, 2015





8 THE SIXTIES PEOPLE FROM CALIFORNIA: A BRIEF OUTSIDE DOCUMENTARY

In 1967, I understood roughly nothing about the so-called counter culture. I was a Philosophy major at Loyola College who had experimented with pot, and all things remaining equal, I was curious where this would take me. Sometimes when I smoked up, it felt like being in a bubble, a cocoon. I have also heard the expression “living in my childhood dream,” and I suppose this would apply to my experience. I had been raised a strict Catholic, had turned against God and the Church in one fell

swoop, and was still painfully a virgin. In terms of the psychology of Wilhelm Reich, I had been raised a fascist. But let me get myself out of the way.

I moved into an apartment at 188 Hillcrest in Ville Saint-Pierre, west of Montreal West, with two other fellows who also took drugs. One of them, whom I shall call Bear, had tried LSD and thought he turned into a guru. When I returned from Europe in August '67, I was appalled to see all my friends had become all gaga about the Beatles and Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. At first, I didn't know what this was about. The change of heart among these middle-class students had transpired while I was away in Europe. They would inject some acid, do crazy things and put flowers in their hair. I thought this was silly. Everyone played guitar and people were talking about peace and love.

Then Bear took me to the apartment of some people he had met who came

from California. One, whom I shall call Freemont, worked as a psychiatrist at Douglas Hospital. I heard he would treat alcoholics by taking some LSD25 with them and going for a walk under the trees in the huge park surrounding the psychiatric hospital. My first impression of this man was that he was physically ugly and repulsive. I couldn't help being afraid of him because of his looks. He had squinty little demon eyes and his face was deformed. He looked like the head of this tribe.

His wife was more attractive and natural-looking. She seemed like a country girl. She never wore shoes. Their television set had the volume off and didn't make noise. One time, the image on the screen showed swine, and she exclaimed to her four year old son, "Look, pigs! Pigs!" She seemed to be at ease with everything. Her two sons roamed around naked in the house and the four year old would walk up to people when they were sitting down and

hand them a hash pipe and tell them, “Why don’t you fuck Sharlene?” Because everyone was sleeping with each other in that house. Freemont slept with Bear’s girlfriend Sharlene and it was a free for all.

I was eager to also try LSD. But Freemont’s wife told me confidentially, “You know, Smitty, all your friends are taking acid. But you shouldn’t try it.” She could tell I would have a bad trip and end up in psychiatry. She had enough decency and sense to warn me.

At the door of their house, there was a psychedelic poster with a welcome sign mentioning peace and love. But one day I took two friends of mine to meet Freemont and his friends, but the psychiatrist sat on the floor and told me, in front of my friends, “Smitty, why don’t you take all your drugs and stick them up your ass?” His wife commented, “Oh, Freemont!” I had pulled out a joint and was about to light up.

Their children walked around the house bare naked even though there were boards and rubbish all over the floor. Both their sons had shoulder-length hair, as did everyone there.

Another character who hung around with these people I shall call Mr Natural. His grandfather was a millionaire and this fellow thought the sun shone out of his arse. He had been to California and spent three or four months on LSD. So he had arrived. When he returned to Montreal, he wanted to convince his grandfather to invest in his LSD dealing business. However his uncles and aunts got wind of it, so Mr Natural was disinherited. He had a girlfriend who wouldn't sleep with him, so the word about her was that she wasn't cool. He always talked to me like I was inferior somehow. He was soooo cool. Cool cool refrigerator cool. Him super cool, as the poem goes.

In April 1968, I left for New York for about six weeks and had all kinds of

adventures there. When I returned, the first thing Freemont said was, "So did you get your picture on the cover of Time Magazine?" OK, I may have been a bourgeois kid, but he didn't need to be so sarcastic. I found these people talked a lot about peace and love, but they weren't very nice to what they called "straight people." In New York, "straight" meant "not homosexual." What we called "straight," they called "establishment people." Anyway, if you wore a suit and tie and had conservative principles, you were an outcast and treated like a fool. Like the Beatles said in their song, "Your mother should know/ Your mother should know/ Although she was born a long, long time ago/ Your mother should know."

Then there were more people who came from California: I shall call them both Walter, because they were both artists with the same first name. One had been drafted into the army and refused to pick up a gun. So they gave

him tranquilizers and put him in solitary confinement, because he was a conscientious objector. Finally, he told me he got a dishonourable discharge. I admire him for this. He said he didn't like computers. So he went from university to university destroying their computers. In 1968, these were huge, three story machines with the power of a .286. He also said one of his sculptures was in the Los Angeles Museum of Modern Art. It consisted in a huge plastic blob with steel wool stuck on top. It was called "Cunt." He objected to the commercialization of fine art. He told us a story about selling a huge painting to a rich old lady for thousands of dollars. Then she phoned him up and complained he hadn't signed the picture. So he figured all she wanted was his signature – so he went to her house and signed the first phony name he could think of. Another time, he sold a painting to a rich young lady, a big painting, and after the sale, he made

love to her on top of the painting as it lay flat on the floor. He told me also he had gone through a divorce and lost custody of his children. I asked him what that felt like. And he replied, "How would you feel if you got your dick cut off?"

I remember that at one point it was Christmas. So Freemont bought Christmas presents for his children every day, so they wouldn't associate Christmas with presents. And one evening, I was at their house, and despite all the counter culture stuff, I saw Freemont explaining Jesus pictures to his four year old son from a Christian book. There was Jesus teaching in the temple, surrounded by the wise men of their times.

May 15, 2016

9 THE WILD GOOSE CHASE

It was a bright, sunny morning in Ottawa, 1944. My father was walking to work, as usual. He came up to an intersection at the same time as another gentleman who was an RCMP officer, when a speeding car almost ran them both down as they stepped off the curb. The RCMP officer grabbed my father's arm and exclaimed, "That was a close call!"

They kept walking together to work, two strangers whom fate had joined in a flash. The RCMP officer in bright red uniform said his name was John Allan and that he worked as a musician in the

RCMP band. My father told him he was a federal translator. They got to talking and Mr Allan asked my father if he could find a French translation of the opera Aida. My father obliged and said he would look for one. The RCMP band was doing a production of this opera and my father could be very helpful.

They walked some more. Mr Allan asked my dad if he had a girlfriend. My father said that no, he didn't. So John Allan said he knew someone who was available. And a few weeks later he introduced my parents to each other.

When I was eight years old, our family had just moved to Ottawa East. It turns out John Allan and his family lived in Overbrook, on the other side of the Rideau River. Mr Allan had two children, Carol Ann and her younger brother Peter. Peter was a rather shy

child but Carol Ann was full of beans. She was my age. This was in 1956.

It was decided that on a Saturday afternoon, Carol Ann and I would go for a bicycle ride around Overbrook, which was a suburb. So we left early in the morning, and then – she wanted a popsicle. So we stopped at a grocery store and I bought her a popsicle. Then it was another popsicle. I bought her another popsicle. And another and another.

We spent the whole day cycling around and buying popsicles. Well, I bought the popsicles and she ate them.

At the end of the day our parents did an inventory of the situation, and John Allan said we had gone off on a wild goose chase. I was very upset that she had made me spend all my money.

The plot thickens. In May 1981, I moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba. Before I

went there, my mother notified me that Carol Ann Allan's brother Peter lived there, but she didn't have his phone number.

I was starting a job in the federal government as an English-French translator, just like my father had been. I had passed the entrance exam in December, and it was a case of "hurry up and wait." Five months later, I received a letter from Ottawa telling me I was stationed in Winnipeg and to show up on May 15 at the office.

I began work and one day I was having lunch alone in a restaurant near the office, when I asked the waiter if he was Polish. We didn't know each other from Adam. He replied, no he wasn't Polish – and why was I asking?

I told him he reminded me of a Polish fellow I used to know called Peter Gizycki.

"Well, my name is Peter Allan," he told me, then he left my table. I thought I would have some fun.

When he returned to my table, I told him, “You have a sister called Carol Ann, and your father is called John Allan. And he is a musician in the RCMP band.”

He was flabberghasted. “How do you know this??”

I let him believe I was psychic or something. “I don’t know, my little finger told me.”

My mother had also told me that Peter Allan had asthma and that was the reason he lived in Winnipeg – because the climate there is very dry. So I added this to the obfuscation: ‘You are in Winnipeg because of your asthma.’”

By now the waiter was having kittens.

We were alone in the restaurant, so I had time to explain and unravel the story of who he was and how I knew it.

Peter was also a musician when he wasn’t waitering and had been commissioned to write the music for the pope’s visit to Winnipeg. He also told

me later on how he converted to Catholicism. He had a Catholic girlfriend who used to take him to mass, and one day, he had a flash that it was all true, all the Catholic doctrine.

We talked to each other a few times during my stay in Manitoba. He was a nice guy. But he was very busy.

I was eventually transferred to Ottawa and stayed there for two years. My mother told me what happened to Carol Ann. True to her mischief, she got married and one day they were broke. So she became a psychic known as "Crystal" and told fortunes and did bogus séances. And she did all this tax free because she incorporated as a church.

May 14, 2016

10 EVIDENCE

One afternoon, in 1994, my daughter Cordelia was around three months old and I was lying in bed in our bedroom. I prayed out loud, “God, give me a sign. Not just a vision or something, but a sign that anyone can see.”

Then my mind wandered off. I went to the bathroom and had a pee. Then I walked at random into the kitchen, where Bonnie was washing the dishes. She was on my left, from the door, and had her back turned to the baby. Cordelia was sitting in a bucket seat on the kitchen table and had broken out of the straps. She was now standing up and

started falling down backwards, down down and was about to land on her head on the tile floor.

I jumped over and caught her in mid-air, a second before she hit the floor. I yelled out, “JESUS CHRIST, BONNIE!!” And Bonnie, who was an atheist, yelled back, “THERE IS A GOD!!”

If I had walked into that kitchen a minute later, the baby could have had a concussion or a broken neck.

August 21, 2016

11 THE ROSARY

Once upon a time, long long ago in a land far far away, I was seventeen years old and went out drinking by myself one night in a night club downtown.

Around midnight, I went out into the night to take the metro home. I was alone in the Peel metro station, and dead drunk. As a matter of fact, I could see down the platform for a hundred and fifty feet – and there wasn't a soul there.

I was staggering and reeling back and forth. I couldn't stand up straight. I was in a fog as the train entered the

station, rushing forward at eighty miles an hour.

The metro was about fifty feet away, as I staggered off the edge of the platform. My feet were still on the platform but I was clearly about to get hit by the train.

Suddenly, I felt someone grab my sleeve at the elbow and yank me back to safety.

I looked around to see who had done this – and I was still alone in the metro station. There was no one there as far as the eye could see. Not a soul.

That evening, I remember coming home around three in the morning. I entered my parents' living room. There was my mother saying the rosary for me. She didn't say a word. She merely packed her rosary and went upstairs to bed.

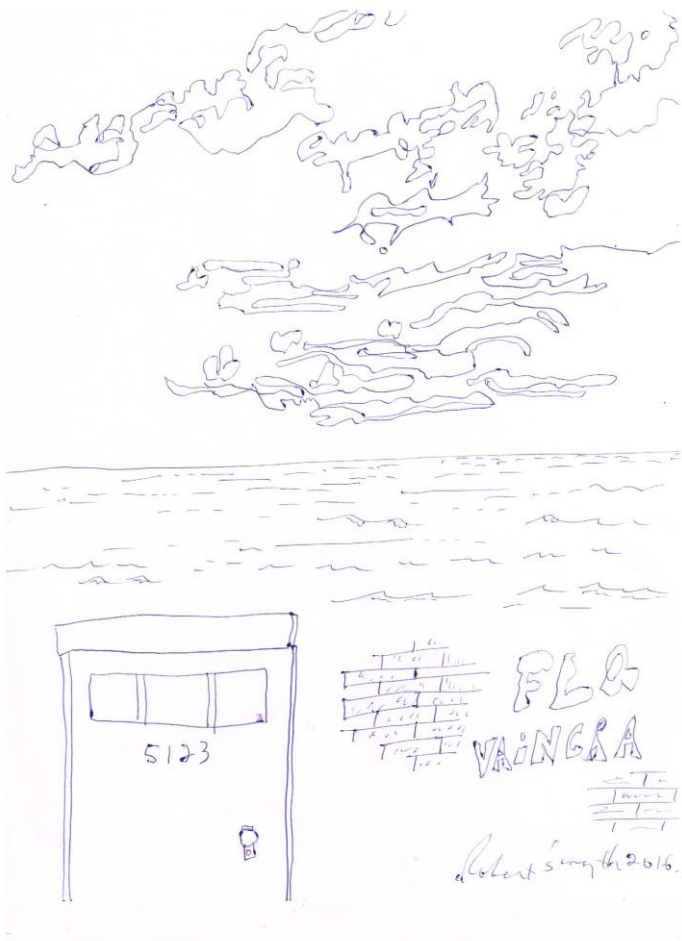
August 21, 2016





Robert's myths 2016.





12 A POSTERIORI

When I was around 18 or 20 years old, my parents had an Italian friend from Venice called Father Toni. I couldn't stand him because he gushed with emotions and always wanted to hug me and called me exuberantly, "Robertino."

One afternoon, after classes, I dropped by my parents' house on Patricia, with my long hair and my clairvoyance. I had been doing a lot of LSD in those days and my third eye was open. My parents were not home.

I walked into the kitchen. Everything was spotless, and I could see a spiritual vibe over the kitchen table and through the window into the backyard. It was a pattern of clear white light hovering still and horizontally just above the table. I didn't know what this was.

When my mother came home, I asked her what had happened that day in the kitchen, and she replied that Father Toni had celebrated mass with them that morning using the kitchen table as the altar.

Oh.

August 21, 2016

13 THE BOOK OF CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

From 1972 to '74, I lived illegally in Colorado Springs, USA. This is a fact. I worked there without a green card or without paying taxes. I was studying the occult in a cult called The Summit Lighthouse. The jobs I had were in hotels or restaurants, doing menial work, and on my days off, I spent long hours in the libraries and hanging around The Four Winds restaurant, which was run by the Summit.

I had noticed a bookstore nearby called the Prague or something, a Catholic bookstore. I had been

collecting spiritual books about the occult, like Annie Besant's classic *Esoteric Christianity* or Ledbeater's book about the chakras. So I thought I would walk into the Catholic bookstore and swipe a few spiritual books.

I saw one on the shelves which fascinated me. It was called "The Book of Catholic Doctrine." It was a huge volume that seemed to contain 1,500 pages. It was on the top shelf along one wall.

I climbed upon a footstool and reached over to steal it.

No. Suddenly, my hand was stopped. I tried again to grab it. Impossible. It was as though there was a forcefield of light protecting the book. An angel perhaps? I had no idea. I kept trying to touch the book, and my hand was blocked.

This spooked me. I walked out of the bookstore emptyhanded.

What did Karl Marx say?
“Christianity is a dim light in the vast
night of capitalism.”

Something like that.

August 21, 2016

14 THE RELICS

Back in my bad old days, I mean forty-five years ago, one afternoon, my friend Harry took me into a Catholic church called Saint Ignatius, in NDG, in Montreal. This intrigued me, because I knew he wanted to put bombs in churches; he figured these institutions were what kept the establishment together. Nevertheless, he wanted a quiet place where we could talk.

He was telling me that the FLQ were his allies because they were the enemies of the federal government and as he said, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

This was the type of conversation we were having, while a couple of devout parishioners were praying in their pews.

Suddenly, I got an impulse to desecrate the altar. I ran out of our pew at the back of the church and up the aisle, jumped over the Communion railing and leaped behind the altar.

And I was standing there, staring at the white cloth on top of the altar, when I could suddenly see little stars shining in the middle of the cloth. They were shining like diamonds.

I remembered there and then what I had learned as a young Catholic boy – those little shining objects were the relics of some saint from the past. A relic is a part of the body of a saint.

I was stunned. I stopped dead in my tracks. I couldn't carry out my project.

I looked ahead of me, and the two or three old ladies in the building were busily praying I wouldn't do any harm.

But then I knew the secret of the priest. It was the relics of the saints that gave power to the altar.

I walked slowly back to my pew and we exited the church. I never discussed with Harry what I had seen there at the altar.

August 21, 2016

15 LE FRÈRE ANDRÉ

My father told me he used to know Brother André. After my dad left the Franciscan monastery, he would go visit the miracle worker to inquire about his vocation. The man on Mount Royal would give him advice.

I've seen a movie about Brother André, in which the holy man spoke in *joual*, like I do, whereas the superiors of his order articulated everything they said as in international French, which sounds like breaking a church window.

One day recently, I had a bad case of sciatica. Have you ever had sciatica? It is a bitch. From your spine down into one

of your legs, there is a debilitating pain that is excruciating.

One afternoon, I was sitting in my wife Bonnie's car with the windows closed, and I was literally screaming and howling because of the intense pain in my left thigh. No one could hear me, but it hurt.

Bonnie came up to the parked vehicle and opened the door. She said to me, "We are going to Saint Joseph's Oratory." I agreed, and we left.

Once we arrived there, we walked in through the chapel and past the room where the crutches are hung. We went around the back of Saint Joseph's altar and up to Brother André's tomb. I laid both hands on the black marble tomb and prayed to God I would be healed of the awful pain in my left thigh.

Right away, I felt the subtle power coming from the tomb into my hands, up my left arm, down my torso and into my left thigh where the pain was. It was a spiritual power and invisible to the

eye, but I definitely felt it – and the pain was gone.

I was still a bit wobbly but I walked away from the Shrine with full strength in both legs. The next day, the sciatica was all gone.

A few weeks later, I went to the clinic and told a doctor about this healing. He replied, “Yes, he still is the great healer.”

And yet, the Quebec government is still trying to wipe out any trace of religion in this city. So sad.

August 21, 2016

16 LE SONGE ANTIQUE DES GARGOUILLES

Il n'y a pas de gargouilles sur mon toit. Ni de chevaliers ni de rois dans mon quartier. C'est la période des élections présidentielles américaines de 2016 mais bien des choses n'ont pas changé depuis l'époque des Croisades. Les Maures sont encore aux portes de la ville, sauf que beaucoup parmi nous sont des Arabes ou des immigrants issus du Maghreb. Toutes les deux ou trois semaines il y a une fusillade, dans laquelle s'impliquent la jihad et les forces de l'ordre. Il n'y a pas plus de sécurité qu'au mauvais

Moyen-Âge. Certaines gens blâment tous les immigrants et veulent les chasser du pays, tout comme en Europe on bannissait les Juifs de tel ou tel pays. Les dirigeants font bonne figure et promettent la sécurité aux citoyens. Les sans-abris entre-temps sont coincés entre les forces de la police et la pression de survivre sans revenu.

L'État a bâti bien des prisons et des postes de police. Il n'y a plus d'exécutions sur la place publique. Machiavel prétendait que cette pratique semait la peur dans le coeur de la populace et assurait l'absence de contestations. Aujourd'hui le cinéma et la télé jouent le même rôle. Tout le monde est branché aux médias sociaux et quand je prends l'autobus, personne ne parle; jeunes et vieux ont les yeux braqués sur leur cellulaire.

On ne se doute pas que la planète est en danger. Les rues ont l'air normales, il y a des parcs et des fleurs partout. On ne voit pas la pollution des sables

bitumineux, par exemple. On ne se rend pas compte que les océans sont en train de mourir. Quelques activistes ont visité le pôle Nord, où les icebergs dépérissent à cause des gaz à effet de serre. La solution serait simple, pourtant : qu'on remplace le pétrole par d'autre chose. Mais personne ne veut renoncer à son auto ou à sa fournaise.

Le problème est que trop de gens sont somnambules. Ils vivent du métro-boulot-dodo et manquent d'imagination. Un des slogans de Mai '68 était "L'imagination au pouvoir". Les masses sont trop occupées à tâcher de survivre pour faire la révolution. Joindre les deux bouts, juste pour avoir deux semaines de vacances par année. Et si les gens sont somnambules, à quoi rêvent-ils? Chacun a sa petite situation avec sa famille et son métier, le patron qui nous écoeure tous, les inquiétudes financières, les problèmes de santé et les enfants qui n'écoutent pas. On ajoute les problèmes plus rares comme la toxicomanie et le

jeu, et la recette est complète. Chacun a son petit monologue qui invente des scénarios dans sa tête comme une souris qui court sur la roulette dans la cage. La police n'a pas besoin d'intervenir – les gens sont déjà prisonniers de leur ego, et ce, à l'échelle mondiale, à raison de milliards de pauvres en esprit.

Dans ce meilleur des mondes à la Huxley, que faire, si on ne veut pas se tirer une balle dans la tête ou sauter en bas d'un pont? Il y en a qui décrochent et se lancent dans le mal de vivre et tirent dans la foule. Non, ce n'est pas la solution non plus. Ça fait des manchettes dans les journaux. Et la vie continue pour les survivants.

Quelles sont nos options? Je connais deux ou trois anciens collègues qui se sont vendus à l'argent. Untel a monté l'échelle et a congédié ses meilleurs amis au boulot pour garder son poste de directeur; maintenant qu'il est retraité, il va jouer à l'argent dans les casinos de Las Vegas. À le croire, on dirait que tout

va bien dans sa vie, mais son fils est psychotique et une de ses soeurs est morte du sida. Pour oublier son mal, il joue au golf été et hiver. Tel autre m'a déjà affirmé qu'il était un "entreposeur". C'est ce qu'on lui avait dit pour se moquer de lui et il n'est pas assez savant pour savoir ce qu'est un poseur. Il est maintenant mon ami quand j'ai de l'argent et du succès; mais quand j'ai des ennuis, il ne me connaît plus.

Je connais aussi quelques gars qui semblent assez heureux parce qu'ils vivent pour l'amour des enfants. Ils visitent constamment leurs enfants et leurs petits-enfants. Leur plaisir, c'est les réunions de famille. Faire des cadeaux aux petits. Au moins leur situation est endurable, parce qu'ils ont le coeur à la bonne place. Ils occupent parfois un emploi quelconque, mais leur vie a un sens.

Il y en a d'autres qui ont la foi. Je vois beaucoup de femmes noires dans la cinquantaine qui lisent des dépliants

baptistes dans l'autobus. Quant à moi, je fais partie d'une secte après l'autre mais la constante, c'est que je vois la présence de Dieu dans ma vie. Je ne mets jamais les pieds à l'église, mais je reconnais la divinité des Juifs, des musulmans, des chrétiens, des Alcooliques Anonymes, des témoins de Jehovah et des hindous. J'essaie d'avoir l'esprit large et d'aider ceux qui sont dans le besoin. Je pratique certains rites tous les jours et j'ai un peu une morale de boy-scout. J'évite de me justifier ou de me prendre au sérieux. Tout le monde essaie de reconstruire le casse-tête de la vie à sa façon. Mais il faut éviter de commettre des bêtises.

Mais la vie n'a pas toujours été ainsi. Au cours des années cinquante, il y avait une loi contre le vagabondage. Par conséquent, il n'y avait pas de sans-abris. Les vagabonds étaient des hors-la-loi. Ma soeur en avait vus un soir assis

par terre autour d'un feu de camp le long d'une voie ferrée. J'étais fasciné par son récit, et tous les racontards de mon père au sujet du monastère où il avait passé son adolescence n'égalaien pas l'aventure de partir, de quitter le bercail, de tout lâcher et de vagabonder. C'est ça que je voulais faire quand je serais grand. À l'époque j'avais à peine quatre ou cinq ans, mais j'avais déjà une vision, une vocation.

Quelques années plus tard, j'avais rencontré des "hard rocks", des motards qui portaient la veste de cuir noir, les "jeans", les bottes de cuir, les cheveux en "jelly rolls" et les favoris longs jusqu'au menton. Moi j'avais environ huit ans et eux en avaient dix-huit ou dix-neuf, mais ils me parlaient d'égal en égal. Aucune condescendance de leur part – pas comme les amies de ma mère. Les grandes personnes ne savaient pas comment parler à un enfant. Parce qu'on parle à un enfant comme on parle

à un adulte. Et les motards me traitaient sur un pied d'égalité.

Je les avais vus dans les bois le long de la rivière, avec leurs blondes et leurs motos Harley Davidson, assis autour d'un feu de camp la nuit, à fumer des cigarettes et à boire de la bière. Ils parlaient tranquillement, ils jasaient paisiblement. Leur ombre s'élevait jusqu'au sommet des arbres, à mes yeux. Et le reflet des flammes et le bruit du bois craquelant me fascinait. Un jour je ferais partie de leur tribu...

Aujourd'hui, j'ai soixante-huit ans et je regarde derrière moi pour voir le bohémien que j'ai déjà été. Je me retourne et je me vois marcher. J'ai des rendez-vous avec le cardiologue, qui est assez jeune pour être mon fils; mon infirmière à la clinique est ma cadette d'au moins douze ans et se prépare pour la retraite; mon médecin de famille est aussi plus jeune que moi – elle prendra sa retraite l'an prochain. Je suis plein d'arthrite et je marche comme une

personne handicapée. J'ai fait un infarctus il y a quinze ans et j'y ai survécu. J'ai les cheveux grisonnants et il me reste la moitié de mes dents. Je possède un dentier mais je ne le porte jamais. Je n'ai plus de force physique et je suis devenu dyslexique il y a vingt ans. Si je prends l'autobus pour me rendre au centre-ville, je suis épuisé. Ma conjointe et moi habitons un condo en banlieue. Quand je regarde par la fenêtre je vois une forêt et des maisons au loin. Mais il n'y a pas de clochards dans la région. Nos enfants ont quitté la maison il y a quelques années et habitent indépendamment. On les voit assez rarement. Et on ne rajeunit pas.

Le 6 octobre 2016.

À quoi sert-il à un homme de gagner le monde entier s'il arrive à perdre son âme?

Depuis deux semaines, Donald Trump a été élu aux États-Unis, Leonard Cohen et Fidel Castro sont décédés. Aussi, mon ami intime Daniel est mort il y a environ trois semaines.

Je ne passe aucun jugement sur ces personnes individuelles; les médias ne cessent de bavarder au sujet des vedettes et des grands personnages de ce monde. Ils ne sont pas plus en vie. Certains sont des minables, mais ce n'est pas ici que je vais les dénoncer.

Je connaissais bien deux artistes qui sont morts il y a cinq ans. Tous les deux croyaient être bien importants. Pourtant nous les avons oubliés depuis. Qui parmi nous sera encore connu dans cinq cents ans d'ici? Nous lisons encore Shakespeare à l'école secondaire, mais personne ne sait vraiment qui il était. Les linguistes et les historiens font de la spéculation au sujet de l'auteur de *Hamlet* et de *MacBeth*. Est-ce Francis Bacon qui aurait composé les pièces de théâtre? Qui était ce dramaturge qui a

inventé tout un éventail de personnages fictifs?

Je vois encore bien des crucifix aujourd'hui. D'autres croient au Bouddha. Bien des gens lisent encore Karl Marx. Certes ce sont des maîtres penseurs. Mais pour les gens moyens, qu'en reste-t-il? Pourtant ils étaient bien accessibles. D'autres génies, comme Kafka, sont des eaux troubles, plus difficiles à sonder. Songeons aussi au *Tao Té Ching*. Peut-on atteindre la même vision sans s'isoler dans une cabane en forêt ou dans un monastère?

Noël approche et les magasins commencent à faire de la publicité. Comme d'habitude nous mangerons de la dinde en famille, mais je connais plusieurs gars qui n'ont pas de famille ni d'enfants à gâter. Comme d'habitude Bonnie et moi inviterons un ami gai ou juif à venir casser la croûte avec nous. C'est un temps de l'année difficile pour les gens à l'hôpital ou en prison; les chauffeurs d'autobus doivent souvent

travailler le jour de Noël. Il s'agit de donner un sens à la vie des gens démunis ou isolés ou souffrants. Il me semble que c'est ça, la voie de la Croix. Une fois, à Ottawa, j'avais demandé à un chauffeur de taxi ce qu'il prévoyait faire le jour de Noël; il m'avait répondu qu'il achèterait de l'héroïne dans une ambassade et une caisse de bière. C'est loin des Béatitudes, hein?

Le 27 novembre 2016.

