A Literary Journal

MIDDLESEX, *A Literary Journal*

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MIDDLESEX

A Literary Journal

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Middlesex: *A Literary Journal*

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Rachel Zimmerman
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Daniel Weeks

Near The Manasquan

Your lips in the flood of light cast down on the river shone
till I kissed out the light. In darkness, now in dream,
our bodies, close clasped, cast down on the grass near the wooden dock
perpetual summer, wet as the waters, wide as the river

itself near Sterling Woods, your whispered love echoing
in the conch of my ear, the river black and rolling beneath
the bridge, washing its fresh stream out to the sea's salt sting.
With earnest tongues dissipate in dawn we sang nothing

of love, which counts change nothing. Slender limbs enlaced,
the silent pines screened our nakedness from neighbors,
and the river, a moon-blind murmuring witness, reminds
our memories to be tender to these teens.

Carteret

Where ducks once nested quietly
beneath the wild punks at water's edge
and fish swam silver and content

in the unsullied stream, Carteret
now squats, poised to crumple
like a drunkard into his unmade bed.

Where the bridges arc into the sky,
hardly noticed by passersby whizzing
to other, more hospitable locales,

there leans Carteret, heavy at the edge
of the expiring marsh, its broken streets
and bitter soot-stained edifices glum-stuck

in mud. Perhaps in deference
the agitated marsh grass will rise up,
a thorny host, to cover the remains.

Snow In Eatontown

We crave the pain
of love and its
obsessions—staring
at the self—
because we think life
owes us a kind of drama,

and then, suddenly:

Here it is: freedom
falling
out of the night sky,
these billion
angels,
            and not
obstreperous at all, no
not at all.

6

Magnolia petals on a tank... fall lightly...
As they fall... on everything, being
The pink delirious things they are.

Philosophers in their overcoats construe
More meaning than meaning thinks its due,
Being the grey barristers of the real
They be. But you, sweating in your spring attire,
Visit devastation on the sweet magnolia tree,
Declawing its blossoms... and trimming the wings
Of birds as they return to their warm abode.

For you the poet unfolds his ode.
For you the tank stutters in its tracks.
For you the petals in my stark heart
Fall in flattering loveliness... for a start.

7

It's enough. To play with scarves in summer air
Is enough. The weaving and the waving
Of their colors in the fresh summer air
Is enough. There is no more to be waved
Or to be woven than what has already occurred.
No past is prologue when the moment's all.
Look how brightly the colors wave and curve!
The summer air is here, and that is all.

The summer air is heavy in the mind,
The mind is old and full of dusty thoughts:
How this becomes that, how the child crawls into the man;
Colors wave and curve, and I calculate their sine.
—*Ai!* You cover me with a hundred scarves uncaught,
And the summer air is bright with omen.

10

If Cezanne painted you, what village would you be?
What pair of Monet's haystacks, soft,
And glistening in sunlit serenity?
To me, too close, you are a crosshatch, crossed
With empty diamonds and abrasive lines,
A certain blotchey rosacea of the soul
Yanking your kite-string down from the divine;
From the eternal you wither into the small.

Here is where we meet, knees beneath the table,
The traffic staticy, the world unstable
That goes zagging through the fog beyond us.

In our discussion's no accordance—
We're as different as figs, as cracks
In the Old Masters, two needles in the haystack.

A Box of Worms

We grow the grass that Whitman trimmed and trod,
Under pilgrim boot and barefoot Indian, walkers for war and God,
We seethed and twined our threads like a wave of the woven sea:
Before the first man gave cry or chant before firelit faces of his camp
We, beneath all the innumerable stories gathered there,
Beneath word and deed and all, threaded buried breast and bone
And sewed ourselves into the dirt that majesty might grow.
That majesty might grow and never look askance,
Our bodies with the bodies of those gone before have danced—
Glittering naked selves, red with life, tongues churned in trance,
We mass among the buried roots that history might ascend;
That one good deed might come and rise above the rest
And destiny be made manifest and not remain an empty dream,
We seethe and twine our threads like waves of the woven sea.

BALLAD OF BILLY THE KID

Every man's a fighting man,
By women or whiskey made glad—
Law's no more than smoke from a gun,
And luck the turn of a card.

For fourteen years desert dawn unfurled
Up the cold hillside where my Ma died;
God plumb stole her merry soul
Through a pinprick in her side.

That Fall I got nabbed by a tin-star man
For a sour mouthful of cheese I stole and hid.
That sheriff sure laughed; he called me a calf,
And branded me "Billy, the Kid."

The winds blew cruel, and wide night shook
The tumbledown sun from the skies;
Up the jailhouse flue I climbed like smoke—
A white rope thrown on high.

Now the law and I are strangers
Cause the law ain't nobody's friend—
I lit out for the open range
And never looked back again.

"An outlaw's life's lonesome rough,"
Declared Pat Garrett, roisterer and rustler.
"Kid," said he, "there's cash on the hoof
High up Rosaverde Mesa."

Galloping nights chased hard-ridden days
High up Rosaverde Mesa—
My soul grew spurs where the coyote bays
And snowy stars bow low in answer.

Those times were best, with Pat my guest
—How sweet the senoritas danced!
We raised campfire cans to life's wry jest
And tossed playing cards for the chance.

* * * * *

Sleep lay deep on the bunkhouse keep,
And soft stars curled slumberin' blue;
A Mexican lady at my side lay sleeping,
And sleep lay on my eyelids too.

Did the darkness slide, that night I died,
Blowed down by Patrick Garrett?
Plugged in the back—despite his peacock pride—
Paid two dollars by a tin-star sheriff.

Tall stars are nothin' but bullet holes
Shot in the fabric of Time.—
Through one such pinprick I send my soul—
It's to those stars I climb.

It's among those stars my story's writ
(Now I am done with lying),
That others may learn by quickened wits
What I have learned by dying:

Every man's a fighting man,
By women or whiskey made mad—
Law's no more than smoke from a gun,
And luck the turn of a card.

Daniel Zimmerman

A GEOGRAPHY

demanding
nothing more than to possess
its shore, ocean chews
the sandy cud
of continents, of islands

it might entirely devour
but for the deeper sea
of magma welling up
through boiling flues
& roiling lava vents

to drive it, hissing,
back, vassal of
mastering winds & grooved
subaqueous clefts & mounds,
asserting earth's ascendancy:

prolific o'er devouring,
promontory over cove,
maximum over mean.
still, sea-born, sublunary,
we walk, awry, like water.

Bank Shots

the nameless things that suffer names
conspire to revolt: whales
change lanes on the whale's road,
wine whitens the sea,
my mistress' eyes, &c.
close & sleep. even to call
a spade a spade rankles
somebody's sensibility.

better to nix names for nick-
names, let sleeping monikers lie,
well known enough to go feral
if fingered, ready to unload

a wilderness of funky consequence
for a *nom de guerre's* unravelling.

Admit One

relinquish your ticket at the door.
lasciate ogni speranza.
give it up. whatever you wished for

offers no umbrella.
an usher will show you your seat.
you can expect an extravaganza

as long as you accept defeat.
talking of Michelangelo
Antonioni, his complete

insistence to show
shot after shot to its end:
as above, so below.

not that the Fates extend
some fashionable courtesy.
no: they ignore the latest trend

toward liberty.
never mind you wish for more.
time to relish their humanity.

INSTRUCTIONS

the dream says listen: I know better.
it offers proofs: it does whatever it will.
the monster ate you but you woke
sweating. take a shower. admire
your limbs, restored. turn air to breath.
the day you don't wake up
you will defeat me.
                                        you didn't win
the heart of that fair lady. thank me
for my protection. the one whose dream
she belonged in sought your life
till I returned her. you will never meet
your dream lover in your sleep, but only
when you permanently interrupt each other
in an otherwise ordinary day. wait for it.
you will know it when you need no names.

Fundamental Forces

jury nullification does not invalidate
evolution, except among members
of the jury. does the pederast priest
preside over transubstantiation?
will engineers enhance embryos
more than pillow talk? will anyone
answer these questions before
hope & fear overtake us, leaving
court & courting moot? shoot
from the hip in the duel. don't aim.
trust the bullet to miss
the fittest. the dark of the moon
is the name of the game.
the picture continues beyond the frame.

No Massé

the imperceptible sustains us.
examples, by definition, cannot follow.
you seemed ready to turn
where I would have gone but for the slow
blur otherwise.

tough to see English on the cue ball
till impact cloud chambers precarious
parallel drift to the side pocket,
marooning the eight ball, caroming
into position, snug to the rail.

show some respect for the table,
the felt. run the rack you'll wish
you hadn't. not this time.
make it a close game. stick
your neck out.

On Translation

The translation issue is a tricky one. It's both an art and a nightmare. When asked what poetry was, Robert Frost answered, "The part that's lost in the translation." That is, the leap of faith, the soul, the epiphany. He hurled a powerful challenge. How to answer him? How to soothe him? After all, he is America's third greatest poet (after Whitman and Dickinson).

For one thing, the translator should know both languages well. There are nuances, idiomatic phrases, undertones in each language that can be easily misread. Occasionally, it's humorous. Awhile back, a Coca-Cola commercial went something like "For the life of it." In China the phrase was translated as "For those who are not yet dead."

Sometimes, it's not so funny. Here is a line from Charles Baudelaire's "Exotic Perfumes": "je respire l'odeur de ton sein chaleureux." Robert Bly translates the lines as "I breathe in the odor of your breasts that give off warmth." That doesn't even sound American. In this case, *odor* in French (or Italian) is not the same as *odor* in American English. The word is *scent*. Also, the line reads stiff and rather gabby for poetry. Enid Rhodes-Passell translates it as "I inhale the scent of your ardent breasts." Here, *scent* is better than odor, but *inhale* reads medical and *inhale* reads too general and not idiomatic. Why not simply say, "I breathe in the scent of your warmth-giving breasts"? There has to be a certain humanity and lightness to a line such as that.

The last line of Dante's **Inferno**, "E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle," reads idiomatically, in American English, as "And so we came out and once again saw the stars." More or less. A recent translation (by Pinsky) reads, "Where we came forth, and once more saw the stars." Dante doesn't say *forth*; he says *uscimmo* -- "we came out." He gives us one flowing line. The translated line reads half musically and lovely and half stiff. Had the translator known Italian would he have used *forth*? One hopes not. In "real" American English, one might be tempted to say "and

so we came out and saw the stars once again" (nice to see you again). But any translator who would shift the word *stars* would take the chance of being pounded by scholars and critics because Dante ends each of his three books of the **Commedia** with the word *stars* (part of the scheme of God, light, order). Still, were I asked to translate **The Inferno**, I would take that chance. I'd drop the terza rima and try to give Longfellow a run for his money. Poets who have other people translate the original and then poetise should call themselves "editors."

The litmus test for translations, as stated by Dr. Johnson, is this: The translated poem has to read like an original, like a poem written in the translated language -- idiomatic, contemporary, musical, human. It should be an American poem. This brings us to the question of what poetry is. What is poetry? (I am a nephew of uncle Ezra Pound here.) Poetry is the most beautiful language musically and metaphorically used to affect an epiphany, to help fulfill the need for Beauty and Order -- to use only those words needed to affect an epiphany, touch the human heart, and to use controlled language that is appropriate to the subject.

Some, as Stephen Dunn does, argue that a poem does not need metaphors, that a poem is its own metaphor. Sure, but the danger here is that this way of thinking can reduce (and often has reduced) poetry to poetical journal keeping and poetical letter writing. Too much poetry has been too much alike for too long now. It's a trap many, myself included, have fallen into. It's too easy to write; it lacks sweat, discipline. As Frost said, "It is like playing tennis without a net."

The creative universe can be compared to a wide, deep river that cleanses and replenishes. To ignore it is to ignore life itself. And a river has banks, form, and a river sings. Translation comes out of that river. Without translation, we wouldn't know Homer or Aeschylus, nor would other peoples know our greats. Human beings have an incredible need for Beauty and Order which are what literature delivers. Riches were not enough for the brave boy in "Jack and the Beanstalk." He risked his life a third time. For what? He had all the money he needed. He went back for the harp.

(Emanuel di Pasquale gave this presentation at the American Academy in Rome on June 25, 2001 after winning the Raiziss/ de Palchi Fellowship from The Academy of American Poets. His twenty thousand dollar prize was based on his translation of Silvio Ramat's *Sharing a Trip: Selected Poems* published by Bordighera Press.)

Panhandler in Music City

Styrofoam cup. Bare foot. Alcove on Second Avenue. // Wasn't he on Broadway before, a woman asks, by the hat store? // He's got a full beard, streaked with gray. Long hair in a pony tail. Baseball cap worn backward. // The woman points to the cup. Vietnam, I bet. // He had two shoes before, clean white socks, drawstring cinch sack with a Titans' logo. // Summer crowd. Music City. Hat shop. Mercantile. Saloon. // Songs leak into the street, bleed to one, blues, rock. George Jones' baritone floats above. I don't count on tomorrow I just live for today. // Our man sings along in a whisper, shakes his cup, tucks two bills beneath. No one likes to be the first.

Hank Kalet

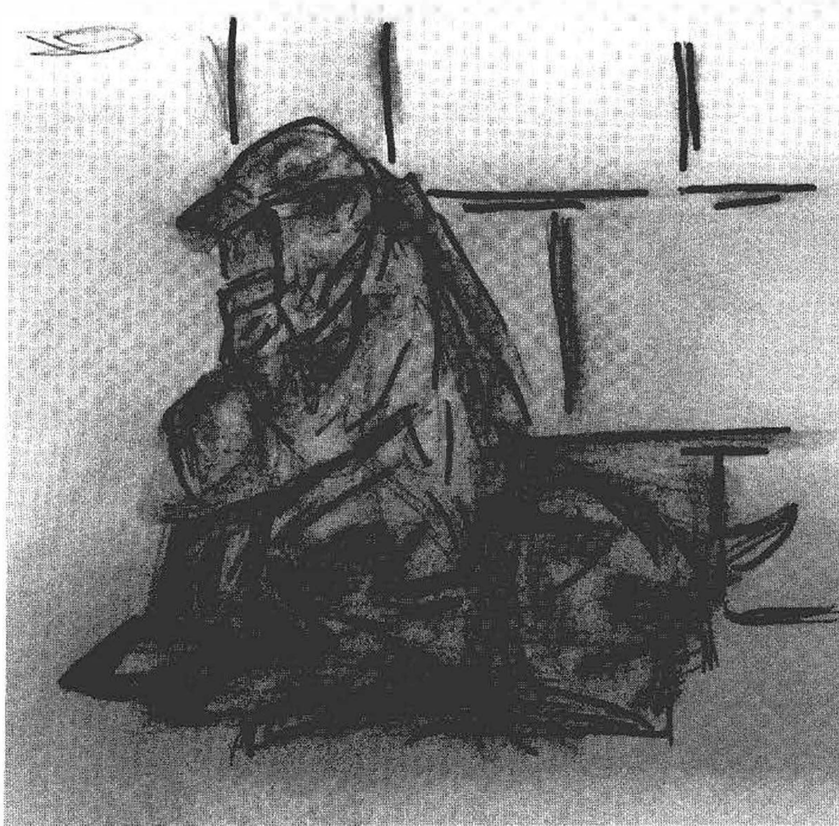
But It's Free

Freedom's just another word he sings as passers-by toss coins into his guitar case, sings nothin' left to lose, strums a G, picks bass notes to change chords, nothin' ain't worth nothin', corner of Broadway & Second in the shadow of The Rock Bottom chain pub. Revelers & families come & go, feelin' good, a key change, a lost love -- would he really trade all his tomorrows and for what? He hums atop the chords, knows yesterday's gone, but that's another song, another time, another city.

Nashville Street Scene

They gather with lunchboxes and smoke their cigarettes. End of a work day. Outside the side-street shop, not far from the tourists, they wrap the day, the week. They speak in Spanish, talk and laugh, eyes wary and sun-squinty. Sweat at the necks, under arms, wiped on sleeves, on ball caps. Sweat and muscle-sore. Sweaty and needing a beer.

Hank Kalet



Refugees All

Rousted from the riverbank, chased to empty lots and hidden corners of the city. // All you can do is keep moving, he says. Eats at the soup kitchen. Shelters under the rail trestle until the cops come. // I know I drink. I try not to. I worked, but now there's no work. // He's slept in the woods, in a tent, warmed by wood stoves, propane tanks. On the street in mouse-eaten blankets. In the shelter. // He is a refugee but not a refugee, a ghost in his hometown, a specter lost in the haze. // Refugees, the UN says, flee home, fear violence, war. Refugees are persecuted. Refugees can't turn back. // Syrians stream north to Europe, to Greece, Hungary, Germany. // Sprawling camp, city in the desert, Eastern Kenya. This is now home, he tells a reporter. I came here because of the famine. From Mogadishu. Because of war. Because

I needed work. // He found cholera. More famine. No work. // One of thousands. Millions. In Daabab, in Lakewood, Seattle. In Mexico City and Texas, Barcelona, Beirut, and Istanbul. // On the outskirts of Paris, the Roma congregate. Build houses, something from nothing, home where there was nothing before. Chased like rats from the light. Chased like cockroaches. // Under a train trestle, a bridge, in the shadow of the new high-rise hotel. On the banks of the Raritan, the Delaware. // Encampment, slum, shantytown, bidonville. City of tents and tarps and abandoned boards. Plywood. Pallets. // What does it mean to be human?

Hank Kalet

Passover Poem

Fruit of the vine, festival
of liberation, exodus, wandering
the desert, salt water and parsley,
break the matzoh, drink
the wine. *Lechem*
min ha-aretz.
Slaves in Egypt. Out
of Egypt in
to the desert.
                Esto es el pan de la afrisyon
our affliction
May whoever is hungry come and eat,
you, in distress,
come –

          bread of poverty
bread of the earth
bread is life
bread
        left to rot as bombs
fall on bakeries
                    bread
unrisen as we fled
across the desert into
Israel
         We were slaves and now
into the sea
               we are free

Out of Damascas,
into Turkey, striving
for Greece, for Europe,
a smuggler's quarry

We are afraid of the sea Lina says

Out into
the narrow strait, in a wooden
boat, not much more
than a raft, afloat
on the Aegean, *takes on water, begins*
to break apart
like her body, twisted as she flees
to the Turkish border, like her
family, scattered like the Jews
to ends of the earth,

a journey
of death Lina says *not a journey*

for survival

the sea fails to split, the sea
rises like the pyramids, like
a border wall, like smoke
from the crematoriums.
The sea closing in, the broken
vessel washed away, another mother,
another daughter, 20 more bodies
left to rest on the sea floor.

Rufus Payne

Rufus Payne, the black gentleman
who sang like the breaking wave
who danced on the ocean moonlight
who inspired the streets of Alabama
who touched Hank Williams into song
and ancient memories:
the pain of Jesus and the Joy
(the man for whom we all walk the line)
the betrayal
the royal throne of love
the resurrection
from praise
forgiveness of shame

Abundance

Abundant in the sunrise and sunset
Brushing her skin with breasts-
And-thigh-healing dew
Cloud risen
She mingles breath to breath
Open armed
Teaching us to wing angelic flight

Raccoon Bob

Roaming in Binghamton
in the daylight from hunger
and Jungian dream fright
I was shot dead
by my eponymous Bob Chapman
A neighbor claimed me rabid
while old lady Ruth
was baby sat by unwilling siblings
and cheap wine drunks
Now I am in cinders
Why pray tell?
I shall wait for each Chapman
as he is delegated to Hell
God just told me
I did not die for nothing
Just wait he said
we will get them
one by one, my
raccoon Bob

For Willie Butler

"When (we) are old
And full of sleep," we sit by the fire
(the cinders our desire);
We fold a page in a loved book
And try not to look
At mirror or brook
And 'think of the soft look (our)
Eyes once had"
And feel the lake
The stream
The lean water line
That leads
From ocean
Into dream.

Il Signor Pound

Il signor Pound voleva un posto sulla gondola,
Ma non le piaceva pagare.
"E` troppo il prezzo," sputava,
Gola di lucertola,
Voce arrugginita.

E poi, poeta di fuoco in un mondo di ghiaccio,
Scriveva a denti stretti.

"La Colonna Greca cade;
Nasce l'idea sense passione.

Ah, donna, vieni,
Sii tu il mio mare…"

……Mr. Pound

Mr. Pound wanted a seat on the gondola,
But did not like the price.
"The price is too high," he spat out,
Throat of lizard,
Voice of rust.
And then poet of fire in a world of ice,
He wrote while grinding his teeth.

"The Greek column falls;
The idea lacking passion is born.

Oh, woman, come,
You be my sea"

For Sharon

When Sharon talks, hummingbird wings flutter
her song is the breath of daffodils
her eyes illuminate
like the greater light
and when she sings
the entire earth rocks and rolls
her red toenails are early
sunrises and sunsets
and when she walks
the winds and deer

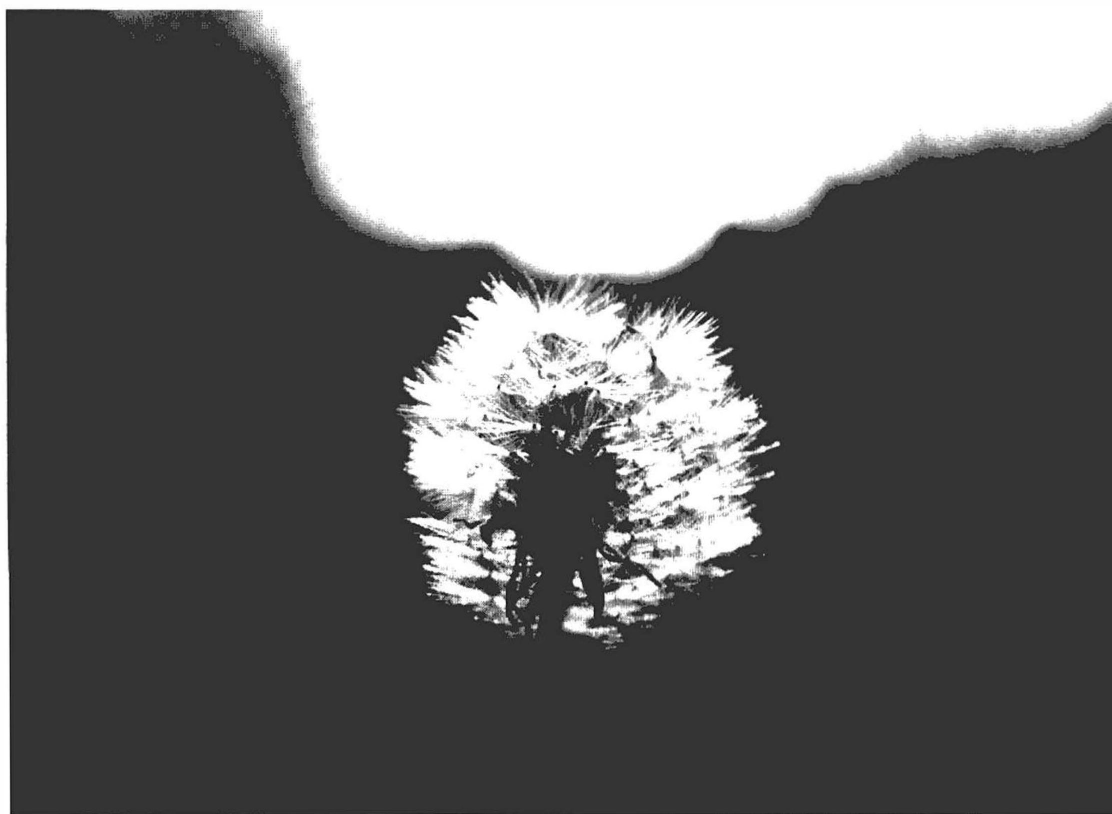
learn from her grace

John Klimko

John Klimko

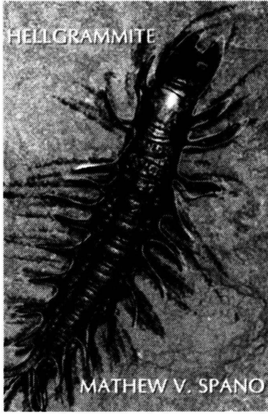
John Klimko

Evan Klimko



Evan Klimko

Evan Klimko



Hellgrammite

Bite the jaws
that bite at you.
Let them find you lodged
in the throat
of the choked beast,
mandibles locked
even in death.
Pierce the toes of selfish giants,
return their blood
to the ceaseless current.
Heed midnight thunder
igniting your lust
from the murk lurking
under river rock
where you like to drag
straggling damsels and knights.
Crawl the ancient path once more,
out of the depths,
onto the rocks,
spanning the moat

over ancestors' bones...
to your own dark corner,
where you can shed yourself
sans cocoon,
sprout dragon wings,
fangs,
haunt lonely streetlights
on the waterfront
spoiling for a fight over a girl--
tiny Brando, fleeting Dean,
Kill-devil,
demon seed.

Mathew Spano

Oracle

The old timer tried to slather my eyes
with mud and spit to wash away blindness.
Where I would watch the same old stretch
of rocks and rapids, he could discern
the speckled trout suspended,
tucked in the current's slim seam,
just behind the tractor tire with the worn treads.
Where I would stare stupidly
at the weedy shallows,
he would spot squalls of swirling tadpoles,
snail tracks mapping the muddy bottom,
a crayfish vanishing like a magician behind
a puff of silty smoke.
Where I would see only the water striders
twitching across their usual routes,
he would witness mayfly nymphs,
tiny dragons clinging
to bottom crags, then sublimating
into angels ascending on solar sails
in spiral clouds up shafts
of dappled sunlight.

"Dig with your eyes," he advised,
but I had only a blunt spade.

"Don't try too hard: just place yourself in the path
of visions—turn on the floodlights, turn off
the spotlight." But my spotlight wouldn't stop
and frantically scanned for any signs
of spectacular prison breaks...
and missed them always.
"See the space between surface and stream bed—
suspension of shiners and grass shrimp lacing
the long hair of the river; that turtle scaling
the half sunken log, mini submarine surfacing,
tiny tank crawling to warm itself, claim its station
among eight siblings all lined up
like stepping stones to the sun."

Then one day, without intention or special effort, I saw—
all that he did and more. Bandages unwound,
the veil lifted, cataracts cleared--whatever I imagined
materialized from the murk revealing itself
in a ceaseless stream of epiphanies—
and I a naive wise man bearing paltry gifts
to the virgin birth.
But as Passion follows epiphany,
vision becomes a curse, the old seer yearns
for the womb's dark warmth
but must bear the cold burden of his gift:

I saw frog feet still twitching
from the strait lips of water snakes;
mink like dark demons dragging rainbows
down into networks of caverns carved by river roots
clinging like claws to craggy banks;
the shadow of an osprey sending fish flashing
right into range of the heron waiting frozen,
bill gleaming like an ice pick poised;
baby pike staring aimless, gap-toothed,
belly big with her too-slow siblings;
gleaming wedding band slid
from an angler's finger or hurled there

when he chose to abandon career and family
and follow the river toward oblivion;
the slumbering corpse of the newborn
set adrift by a distraught teen—Moses sans his basket;
a submerged issue of *Time*, 9/11 still kicking up
clouds of debris from the silty bottom.

Root of the Matter

A swift Sligo gale exposed her art—
Uprooted Beech caught in the act,
The unbleached bones shown in her womb,
Some Gaelic youth, his tomb undisturbed
Since before the Normans,
Now dangles, tangled in roots,
Strangled by slow serpents,
Skull sucking earth matter,
Soil-filled sockets,
Reborn in bark, leaf, bud—
Umbilical Uroboros.

Mother of the Woods, you lie revealed:
Beech Queen who suckles the starving
With tree nuts, hard nipples, shelters
With wide branching embrace--
Queen Bitch, who can sap a young soul,
rewrite him, a character
in her endless (de)composition,
A single page in her ancient book,
Beech leaf.

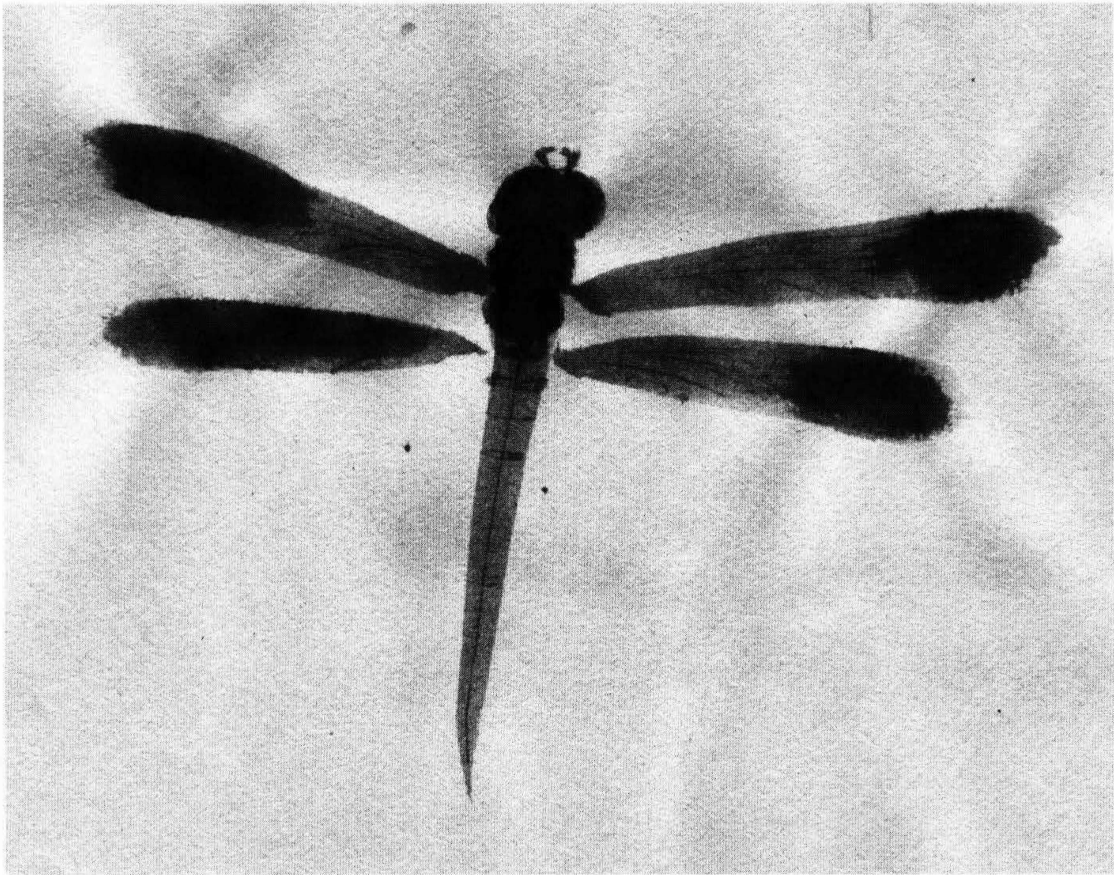
Mathew Spano

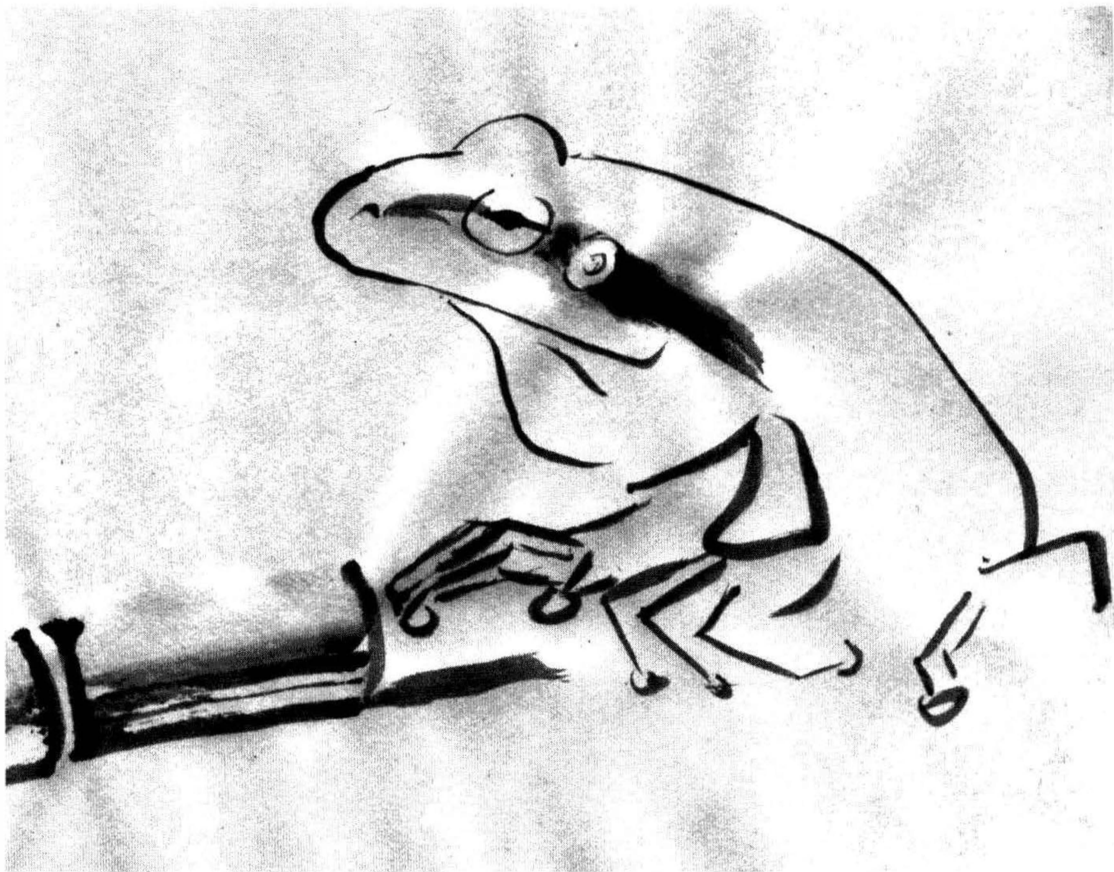
HELL HATH NO FURY

Who conjured the Bobbit worm
from no cozy hobbit hole but a black cauldron
of ancient rage boiling up beneath the Aegean?
Was it Medea and Lorena, Ariadne and Dido--wrathful coven
who buried the spring-like coils in the sea bed,
armed antennae to wait for a wandering Puffer,
a pumped up Jason or Theseus,
bloated Aeneas or John Wayne on the prowl?
He cruises in, swollen, looking to pry open
some naïve little clam—
no Hillary Clinton or Clytaemnestra—
spread her wide to his pricks and poison.
Creeping closer, he trips the wire,
spike trap triggered—rapid fire surprise:
the invisible worm that flies in the night,
snake from a can that strikes
with toxic fangs to pop his charm,
pierce his ego, paralyze his will--

the rapist raped,
castration via the witches' worm,
the bait that bites back.
It sucks him into the sea bed
to be devoured
like Don Juan dragged to Hell.

Mathew Spano





Mathew Spano

Daniel Zimmerman

The Compleat Angler: A Review of Mathew V. Spano's Hellgrammite (Cliffwood, NJ: Blast Press, 2016).

The title of Mathew V. Spano's *Hellgrammite* refers to the furious larva of the Dobson fly, a favorite food of trout. A fly-fisherman, Spano knows his bugs. A picture of the creature graces the cover. He presents amazements, wonders sufficient to themselves. He doesn't exploit nature or subsume its wonders to personal ends or even universal ones, as in Alexander Pope's phrase, "Nature Methodiz'd." The book comprises four sets of poems, a section of haiku, and two short stories.

The first set opens with "Wading the Rio Grande." The speaker offers instructions on how to equip oneself to encounter nature on its own terms. He provides the knowledge and respect that danger tends to avoid, showing how humans—no salmon—must go with the flow.

Perhaps death always comes as—or with—a surprise. In "When the Light No Longer Lingers," the light from a dead trout's eye "danced downstream / in the dappled sunlight" and, in the pocket of a hooked corpse, he finds "a message in a bottle, firefly in a jar: / a single photo of his son." These images belie the title with new forms of light persisting beyond death.

"Root of the Matter" and The Acorn Sowers" move from the unearthing of a long dead "Gaelic youth" tangled in a beech tree's roots to a ritual Spano and his father enjoyed, casting tree nuts from a car window to grow into trees for people to fashion into tools or instruments—baseball bats, violins, pencils, boats—giving them new life.
In "Comic Book Artist," the angler as artist wields his pencil like a fishing rod, populating the flat surface of his paper sea with a monster of the deep ("What will it tease to the surface? / What summon up from the dark?" He asks in "Surface Lure") which ironically eludes his attempt to frame it over his mantle, "plunging deep into the vanishing

point."

For the first several years of his poetic practice, Spano wrote haiku exclusively, honing his focus on revelatory moments of perception presented with exact economy. From the haiku section:

snow erasing
the garden's features—
teaching my dad to shave

*

empty stringers—
the old man pulls a rainbow
out of the fog

*

tropical fish tank—
fingerprint smudges
on the "Do Not Touch" sign

More recently, his work has grown more discursive, though no less compelling—expanding those moments, joining them with others to offer broader contexts than the haiku's Zen master stick. Often, those contexts reflect his long involvement with C. G. Jung's dream work, about which he has written insightfully. An epigraph to the book situates the author's most characteristic point of view:

"I sat there and forgot and forgot, until what remained was the river that went by and I who watched... Eventually the watcher joined the river, and there was only one of us. I believe it was the river."

—Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*

In his many poems about unusual animals, his specificity rivals that of Agassiz, or of Melville describing the anatomy of the whale's tail, and his delight recalls writers like Annie Dillard in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. "Tardigrade" celebrates an astonishing creature, half a millimeter long, the greatest survivor for millions of years:

Posing on a pencil point,
cute as a comma,
tiny moss piglet
plodding, pudgy-legged, through the plot
of the Great Mother's tome,
through chapters each ending
with a great Negation:
trilobites trimmed,
T-Rex and pterodactyl,
expunged and redacted;
mammoth and sloth
blotted out in Her onslaught.

Tardi bear, ready to brave
radiation enough
to melt a man to his socks.
Hardy badger, steady
under pressure more crushing
than the sea's deepest crevasse.
Shrugging off absolute zero,
blowing bubbles at the boiling point,
Her toughest little tyke
who tucks himself in
for ten years without a bite
or a drink in the middle
of the long, long night.

Till he wakes in a drop of dew
ready for breakfast before his next big test:
more asterisk than astronaut,
naked in space all alone,
he can suck up the void,
vacuum the vacuum,
till he tumbles toward the next blue dot,
carrying Her biography,
himself the final period
in our all too brief epitaph.

A poet of invitation, of admonition, of meditation, his work finds company in Emily Dickinson's and Gary Snyder's realizations of what William Blake called "minute particulars"—not pastoral, rarely allegorical; not idyllic or symbolic, but a chronicle of astonishments. "Sleeper Shark" introduces us to a rare species that can live for hundreds of years, that feeds on fish and seals and polar bears and reindeer, most of them caught in their sleep—a predator with glowing worms in its eyes to lure herring, and whose untreated flesh intoxicates whoever eats it. The context rivals Hemingway in *The Old Man and the Sea*, because a Norwegian in a kayak caught the thousand-pounder after hours of perilous struggle:

Out of the murk, up from the pit,
the leviathan lolls, strength sapped at last,
as gaff, hooks and cords lash it fast,
a thousand pounds of dark matter,
amassed over centuries, now neatly cleaved
into steaks, cured of their poison,
to become the darkness in the angler's glare,
the menace in his low drunken laugh,
the silence that outlasts his tale.

Even in the occasionally dark moments he invites us to ponder and embrace, Spano never succumbs to the morose banalities of the confessional poets, but reminds us with tender whimsy of our precarious but glorious existence. For that alone he deserves our thanks but more, for this collection, our admiration. Buy this book.

Daniel Weeks

Rousseau, the Apostle of Emotion and Imagination

Alas! my most lasting happiness belongs to a dream, the fulfillment of which was almost immediately followed by the awakening.
—Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is normally identified with the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, but he had significant disagreements with the Idea of Progress and, therefore, with the very basis of Enlightenment thought. His disagreements became the disagreements of the Romantics, and by virtue of this, Romanticism, even though it builds on the foundation of Descartes and Locke, became a reaction against the fundamental ideas of the Age of Reason. Rousseau must, as a result, be identified as perhaps the most important forefather of the Romantic movement.

While the Idea of Progress held that reason is supreme, Rousseau noted that it can lead humanity astray. In fact, he believed that reason, if relied on too much or if used irresponsibly, would erode or destroy the very things that hold society together. Rousseau recognized that while reason must be used to regulate and administer society, it is really only a steward that, when used responsibly and in a limited way, protects what imagination and emotion have created. These views made Rousseau an apostle of the value of emotion and imagination in the face of the Enlightenment, and the Romantics of the next generation would seize upon his arguments to develop a thoroughgoing critique of the supremacy of reason.

Rousseau's assault on reason is found most famously in his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*. But his skepticism toward reason pervades his writing and can also be found in works such as *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* and *The Social Contract*. In his *Discourse on Inequality*, published in 1754, he argued that without emotion there could be no utility in reason.

> Whatever the moralists may say about it, human understanding owes much to the passions, which by common agreement also owe much to it. It is by their activity that our reason is perfected; we seek to know only because we desire to have pleasure; and it is impossible to conceive why one who had neither desires nor fears would go to the trouble of reasoning. The passions in turn derive their origin from our needs, and their progress from our knowledge. For one can desire or fear things only through the ideas one can have of them or by the simple impulsion of nature; and savage man, deprived of every kind of enlightenment, feels only the passions of this last kind. His desires do not exceed his physical needs.[i]

In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau contends that emotion is also indispensable to the creation and operation of the law. He lists four kinds of laws necessary to a well-functioning society: 1. Fundamental laws or constitutional laws, which determine the powers of government; 2. Civil laws, which govern the relations between individual citizens and between each citizen and the body politic; 3. Criminal laws, which govern the relation between the citizen and the law; and finally, 4. Moral law. This last is, he says,

> The most important of all, which is inscribed neither on marble nor brass, but in the hearts of the citizens, a law which forms the true constitution of the state, a law which gathers new strength every day and which, when other laws age or wither away, reanimates or replaces them; a law which sustains a nation in the spirit of its institution and imperceptibly substitutes the force of habit for the force of authority. I refer to morals, customs and, above all, belief: this feature, unknown to our political theorists, is the one on which the success of all the other laws depends; it is the feature on which the great lawgiver bestows his secret care, for though he seems to confine himself to detailed legal enactments, which are really only the arching of the vault,

[i] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ***Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men***, in ***The First and Second Discourses***, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Roger D. Masters and Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 115-16.

> he knows that morals, which develop more slowly, ultimately become its immovable keystone.[ii]

Earlier, in *The Social Contract,* he had contended that man sacrifices his natural independence for moral freedom when he enters into society through the social compact. Rousseau believes this is a worthwhile exchange, a reasonable one. In nature, man is on his own and must defend himself and his possessions against all others, some of whom may be stronger. Natural man does, though, have a certain independence because there are no social restraints on his activities. But once man enters society, the body politic, through laws, protects his person and his interests. He has moral freedom because he participates in making the laws that govern his conduct as well as the conduct of his fellow citizens. His ability to achieve freedom again comes from a sharpening of his moral awareness and through the use of reason. As Rousseau notes in *The Social Contract,* man in society, unlike man in nature, can achieve virtue because he has attained a knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge comes from the development of private property, and it seems to be exercised through reason applied to law.[iii]

But, in Rousseau's thinking, the moral law is not based solely on reason. In the passage above, he notes that it is inscribed on "the hearts of men," not in their heads. This suggests an emotional dimension to the moral law. He also says that custom and belief are part of the moral law, and it must be said that each of these may go further than reason is able to in establishing a people's moral idea of themselves. Moreover, this type of moral law, graven on the heart, seems beyond the scope of political theorists, who deal in logical analysis only.

Although Rousseau never fully develops this argument, it can be inferred from his philosophical writings that he believes emotion and imagination to be the adhesives that hold all human relationships together, including society itself. Philosophers and political theorists, though, from the time of Rousseau on, have been too dismissive of this

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[ii] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ed. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 99-100.

[iii] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 64-65; Rousseau *Discourse on Inequality*, 128-29, 133, 154.

idea. For most of them, whatever is emotional smacks of irrationality, and imagination has a will-'o-the-wisp quality that hardly allows for serious "scientific" analysis. This might be a bias from Marxism, which limited analysis to material conditions, or from the physical sciences, which have largely dealt with what can be measured in space and time. And yet, in philosophy it is harder to prove that concrete material things exist than to prove the existence of emotion and imagination. René Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, showed that perception is fallible and offers no ironclad proof that the physical world exists at all. He cannot even prove to his own satisfaction that his own body exists because it seems to disappear while he is sleeping, even though his consciousness plays on through the night in dream. Descartes is left with consciousness alone. I can prove that the self exists, he says, because I am thinking and feeling.

David Hume even doubts whether one can use logic to show that the self exists. If one exists because one is conscious, he asks, what does this mean? Consciousness seems to be merely an endless parade of perceptions, either from the external world or from imagination or dream. If one is having these perceptions, one must be the perceiver of them. The self, then, seems to be the perceiver. But, as Hume shows, the perceiver is never without a perception of something other than itself and therefore never has a perception *of* itself. Because the perceiver can never perceive itself, it cannot truly prove its own existence in the way Descartes asserts. All it has is its train of perceptions, which Descartes admits, can never prove anything at all. They may be real or they may simply be figments of the imagination.[iv]

One need not go even so far as Hume to see the difficulties in creating rationally derived relationships with other human beings. One can accept for the moment that the self exists and still encounter insurmountable difficulties. If reason can never even prove the existence of other human beings, what basis can it provide for a relationship with them? Rousseau seems to have intuitively understood this problem without directly addressing it. For him, good human relationships are

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[iv] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (London: Oxford University Press, 1888), 251-53, 635.

created out of a love for oneself (the thing we can at least "feel" exists). This self-love is then imaginatively applied to other human beings. Our keenest instinct, coming from what is natural to us, says Rousseau, is self-preservation. This instinct itself is based on emotion. We wish to preserve ourselves because we *care* about ourselves.[v]

In the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau says that in the state of nature (before the creation of private property and society), humans were fundamentally good because they had natural empathy for one another. To prove this he invites his readers to think of their own reaction to seeing another human being in pain.[vi] Our first response is to wince as if we felt the pain ourselves. In other words, we put ourselves imaginatively in the place of the injured person. Keats would later famously call this kind of imagination "negative capability." Our second response is to aid the injured person. In his or her place, we would desire to be "preserved," and since we have imaginatively placed ourselves in the position of the injured party, we naturally want to help. It is only when reason kicks in that we fail to act upon these natural and good human impulses. We may then reason: "If I get involved, I may get sued later. It could be a hassle for me. Maybe I should just leave."

In entering into society, then, says Rousseau, humans exchange natural independence for an existence based on an appetite for moral freedom, which requires rationality applied to law. But Rousseau also sees that rationally derived laws could not possibly be framed without reference to a natural "fellow feeling" or "empathy," which has its basis in self-love imaginatively applied to others. When the sovereign people make a law, each individual citizen must first consider, imaginatively, how such a law would affect himself as projected into a variety of different situations. For Rousseau, this is a kind of political morality. In other words, if one were a shoemaker, it would be immoral to support a law that helps only shoemakers at the expense of everyone else. The shoemaker must imaginatively put himself in the position of the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker and consider the law from their perspectives as well. This is the only way a fair law can be made.[vii]

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[v] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 128-31.

[vi] Ibid., 95-96, 129-31.

[vii] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 63-64; 112; 150-51.

Self-love imaginatively extended to another person is also the basis of every love relationship. Since we can never actually get inside the head of another person, we can never exactly know what another human being is thinking or feeling. We can never "know" another person at all. Lovers do not truly love each other but only what each imagines the other to be. As long as the beloved does not seriously deviate in action from the lover's imaginative idea, the relationship may remain strong. But, as Rousseau understood, there is always a real difference between the physical beloved and the imagined. We have all experienced, at least at second-hand, times when the beloved becomes a traitor to his or her image: The husband who seems a picture of love and fidelity who suddenly runs off with his mistress; the model wife who plots her husband's murder in order to make off with his life insurance. Still, in spite of its flaws, love, when sanctified in the marriage bond, is for Rousseau the thread that forms the very fabric of society. The woman holds the man to her by exciting him erotically, and the social value of this erotic interaction is realized when the woman achieves equal power in society with the man by converting his desire for her into moral energy.[viii] From the woman's perspective, Rousseau's contract between the sexes goes something like this: "I will satisfy your desire, if you will act morally toward me, your children, and toward society in general." The man then goes out into the world of politics and business infused with the moral energy the woman has imparted to him.

Although the erotic attraction between men and women manifests itself physically, it begins in the imagination. The woman uses her charms to fire the man's imagination with desire. Marriage is the social recognition of this imaginative love-bond, and for most mortals, marriage, which is a bond or restriction after all, is the best that can be achieved within society. Humans sacrifice natural independence for moral freedom within the bonds of society, and the basic bond tying men and women to society is marriage. But something is lost. It seems inescapable for Rousseau that natural freedom is superior to the freedom one can achieve within society.

[viii] Joel Schwartz, *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 41-46.

According to Rousseau, men and women in the state of nature were essentially equal and free from all but the constraints of survival. They came together only to copulate. Because they formed no other bond, each was free and independent, though the woman was responsible for a time for the offspring. Once society is formed, such independence becomes impossible. But, in Rousseau's view, even within society, men and women can achieve social equality, though each in a separate sphere. The woman controls the home and exercises her influence through her husband and male children by training them morally, and the husband exercises his influence directly in politics. Natural equality and independence are exchanged for social equality and moral freedom, which require commitments unknown in the natural state. But it is only through the bond of marriage and the maintenance of separate spheres that men and women can achieve social equality. If women attempt to enter into politics directly, says Rousseau, they will lose their moral position in the family and will never become the equals of men in the arena in which men excel—the political arena.[ix] Thus, for Rousseau, society, which is vital for the survival of humanity, is largely an enterprise of the imagination, and while the idea of separate spheres is hardly acceptable today, his larger point on the critical work of the imagination is not negated. The laws are based on what people imagine is necessary for self-preservation, and the marriage bond is made strong by a love (the extension of self-love) that each partner has for what he or she imagines the other to be.

According to Rousseau, this interdependent life in society is fine for most men and women, but there are some few superior beings, such as himself, who can never be satisfied with social equality and moral freedom. These rarified few seek to reacquire the independence of the natural state. But as Joel Schwartz has pointed out in his book *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, recapturing the independence of the savage is impossible for these prodigies precisely because they are prodigies. They can never be content in a society that must cater to the common man and woman. But they can also never go back to being the unimaginative, uncultured savage in a state of nature. The savage

[ix] Schwartz, Sexual Politics, 38, 41-47; Cranston, introduction to *The Social Contract*, 32. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 64-65.

thought only of satisfying his needs in the present. Once his physical sexual needs were met, he simply moved on until a new urge led him to seek any available woman. But the cultured man of society, such as Rousseau, has both physical and imaginative needs. For him, sex is not just an act of copulation; it is also the culmination of an elaborate psychological ritual in which imagination heightens eroticism.[x] Thus, sexual relationships within society are erotic, imaginative, social, economic, and political, as well as physical. They bind the participants to each other and to society. Therefore to engage in sex within society leads directly to the loss of the very independence Rousseau seeks.

To explain this predicament, Schwartz takes us through Rousseau's various relationships with women. Rousseau's ideas of sex came from his early experiences, which were troubled. His mother died a few days after giving birth to him, and his father abandoned him when he was only ten. His most important connection to a woman in his early life came in his teen years. When he was just sixteen, he was taken in by the Baroness de Warens, who converted him to Roman Catholicism and seems to have represented the ideal woman to Rousseau for the rest of his life. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau describes the erotic impact of his first encounter with Madame de Warens: "What I saw was a face that was charm itself; beautiful blue eyes, full of sweetness; a ravishing complexion; the curve of an enchanting bosom." She was both beautiful and kind, which must have meant a great deal to Rousseau at a time when he was little more than an abandoned boy. He fell in love with her though she was fourteen years his senior. At first, his love was an idealized adolescent affair. This platonic love for Madame de Warens's "image" kept him safe for a time from any messy connections with other women.

> Her image, ever present to my heart, left room for no others; she was for me the only woman in the world; and the extreme sweetness of the feelings with which she inspired me did not allow my senses time to awake for others, and protected me against her and all her sex.[xi]

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[x] Schwartz, *Sexual Politics*, 98-100.

[xi] As quoted in Schwartz, The Sexual Politics, 102.

This love of an image, which kept Rousseau chaste and pure, was soon the conduit by which he entered into a real sexual relationship with Madame de Warens. But once he possessed the whole, body and soul, this physical relationship created bonds that ill became a man who sought independence most of all. After more than eight years with Madame de Warens, Rousseau left to seek his fortune in the wider world.[xii]

Madame de Warens provided a model for Rousseau in another important respect. She came as close as one might to maintaining natural independence within society. She had deserted her husband, had her marriage annulled, and thereafter took a series of lovers, rejecting them as soon as they no longer interested her. She had no children of her own to look after, and she lived simply though comfortably on a stipend from the King of Sardinia.[xiii]

A second important relationship developed when Rousseau went to Venice as the secretary to the French Ambassador there. In Venice, Rousseau entered into a liaison with a prostitute named Zulietta. Zulietta's physical beauty was matchless, and to Rousseau she seemed perfection itself. But this very perfection prevented Rousseau from making love to her. As he describes the encounter:

> I entered the room of a courtesan as if it had been the sanctuary of love and beauty; in her person I thought I beheld its divinity. I should never have believed that, without respect and esteem, I could have experienced the emotions with which she inspired me. No sooner had I recognized, in the preliminary familiarities, the value of her charms and caresses than, for fear of losing the fruit of them in advance, I was anxious to make haste to pluck it. Suddenly, in place of the flame which consumed me, I felt a deathly chill run through my veins; my legs trembled under me; and, feeling ready to faint, I sat down and cried like a child.

[xii] Ibid., 102-103; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions* (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), 184-85.

[xiii] Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques: The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 1712-1754 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 48.

> Who would guess the reason of my tears, and the thoughts that passed through my head at that moment? I said to myself: This object, which is at my disposal, is the masterpiece of nature and love; its mind and body, every part of it perfect; she is as good and generous as she is amiable and beautiful. The great ones of the world ought to be her slaves; sceptres ought to be laid at her feet. And yet, she is a miserable street-walker, on sale to everybody.[xiv]

Zulietta was beautiful and kind, but she was not a woman of quality as was Madame de Warens. Rousseau became frantic because it seemed to him that his emotions were binding him to Zulietta against all reason. "Either my heart deceives me, dazzles my senses, and makes me the dupe of a worthless slut, or some secret defect, with which I am unacquainted, must destroy the effect of her charms, and render her repulsive to those who would otherwise fight for the possession of her."[xv] He was, at this point, allowing reason to interfere with the effect of Zulietta's charms on his imagination. He thinks: *There must be something wrong with her, otherwise she wouldn't be just a prostitute.*

Rousseau began to hunt frantically for a defect that might break the hold her beauty had on his imagination and emotion. Then he discovered it. She had only one nipple. After getting over his initial revulsion at this deformity, he seemed ready finally to make love to her as the prostitute she was but then insulted her by inquiring about the deformed nipple. After this, Zulietta, "the worthless slut," would have nothing to do with him.[xvi]

In his encounter with Zulietta, Rousseau learned that imagination and emotion can lead one astray unless reason tempers them. With Madame de Warens there was no such difficulty because she was precisely what Rousseau imagined her to be, and he loved her for it. With Zulietta, imagination and emotion could not be reasonably reconciled in his mind with what she truly was. Moreover, one could not be truly

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[xiv] Rousseau, *Confessions*, 329.

[xv] Ibid., 329-30.

[xvi] Ibid., 330-32.

independent, as Rousseau wanted to be, when one's imagination and emotion were involved in a love relationship. These were strong ties that bound one to others, to society. And for Rousseau, they seemed to be a product of society itself. Perhaps it would be best, he then reasoned, to limit his relations with women to those that involved neither imagination nor emotion.

Soon after his return to Paris, Rousseau seemed to have found such a relationship with Therese la Vasseur, a laundress who worked at the hotel where he stayed. Rousseau was attracted to Therese because of her modest behavior and natural simplicity. She was a hard worker and uncomplaining, which meant that she could take care of Rousseau's sexual and domestic needs while he remained largely independent. She was good-looking, but did not have the striking beauty of Zulietta. Nor did she possess the intelligence or high-born status of Madame de Warens. Rousseau says that he tried to teach Therese to tell time and do simple arithmetic but with no success. He also tells us that he could never teach her to read well. She did not excite him erotically or emotionally. He did not develop for her the overwhelming passion that seems to have marked his other love relationships. He did, though, develop what he describes as an "affection" for Therese, a "sympathy," a "compassion." But that was all. As Rousseau himself described the relationship in later years, "from the first moment I saw her and until this very day, I have never felt the least spark of love for her . . . and . . . the needs of the senses which I satisfied through her have been for me solely those of sex." And yet, in spite of this, his relationship with Therese was the most enduring he had with any woman. He told her he would never marry her, but that he would never abandon her either. Rousseau seems to have kept his promise and to have gone beyond it. Eventually, he did marry her. By his own account, she bore him five children, all of whom Rousseau immediately consigned to a foundling hospital. With some reluctance, Therese seems to have accepted Rousseau's decision to abandon the children to the state, and it is very likely that it was her docile acceptance of whatever he desired that Rousseau found attractive.[xvii] In short, Rousseau had found in Therese someone who could meet his physical needs without creating

[xvii] Rousseau, *Confessions*, 339-41, 353-54, 366-67, 427; Frances Winwar, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Conscience of an Era*, (New York: Random House, 1961), 180.

any imaginative, intellectual, or emotion demands. His relationship with Therese, therefore, was the closest he could come, says Schwartz, to achieving within society the sexual and familial independence of the savage.[xviii]

The problem for Rousseau was that his relationship with Therese could not satisfy what he came to realize were the very real needs of imagination and emotion. Rousseau, therefore, attempted another strategy. In the spring of 1756, he moved to a cottage on the grounds of the chateau La Chevrette, which belonged to his friend Madame d'Epinay. Madame d'Epinay refurbished the cottage, known as the Hermitage, especially for Rousseau and Therese. Here, he believed, he would be able to work in peace, away from the literary intrigues and constant disruptions he had suffered in Paris. He would also be able to wander over the chateau grounds and enjoy rambles among the natural beauties of the forest of Montmorency.[xix] It was here, too, that Rousseau would give himself over completely to the world of his imagination.

"The first, the greatest, the most powerful, the most irrepressible of all my needs," Rousseau confessed, "was entirely in my heart; it was the need of a companionship as intimate as was possible; it was for that purpose especially that I needed a woman rather than a man. . . This singular want was such, that the most intimate corporeal union had been unable to satisfy it." Part of his problem seems to have been that any attachment of the heart to a real woman struck at the root of his cherished natural independence. Rousseau, now forty-five years old, wondered why he had never been able to completely satisfy his all-consuming "desire for loving." He worried as he approached old age that he might die without ever having lived. If a corporeal union could not simultaneously satisfy Rousseau's need for emotional attachment and natural independence, then, he reasoned, he must turn to an incorporeal union.[xx]

In the midst of these concerns, Rousseau wandered through "cool

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[xv ii] Schwartz, *Sexual Politics*, 106.

[xix] Ibid., 106; Winwar, *Rousseau*, 231.

[xx] Rousseau, Confessions, 428 and 440.

groves" and beside chuckling brooks, entertained the day through by the nightingale's song. Soon he began to cast his mind back on all of his previous romantic attachments. "I saw myself surrounded by a seraglio of houris," he says, "My blood became heated and inflamed, my head swam, in spite of my hairs already growing grey." Rousseau soon realized that the imagination alone could inflame the strongest emotions.[xxi]

It might well be, Rousseau thought, that a real woman was not required to satisfy one's emotional needs. He knew that to take on a real lover would expose him to the ridicule justly due an aging beau and might also stir up "domestic storms" with Therese. An imaginary lover involved no such complications. Moreover, real women invariably slipped away from what their lovers imagined them to be in the first place. They could never live up to the ideal. So why not simply love the ideal itself? As Rousseau expresses it:

> The impossibility of grasping realities threw me into the land of chimeras, and, seeing nothing in existence which was worthy of my enthusiasm, I sought nourishment for it in an ideal world, which my fertile imagination soon peopled with beings after my own heart. This resource was never so welcome to me or so fruitful. In my continued ecstasies, I intoxicated myself with full draughts of the most delightful sensations that have ever entered the heart of man. I entirely forgot the human race, and created for myself societies of perfect beings, heavenly alike in their beauties and virtues.[xxii]

In spite of interruptions from visitors, an attack of his chronic health complaint (an inability to urinate), and the domestic disruptions that Therese's mother sometimes occasioned, Rousseau spent much of his time rambling through the countryside in a state of reverie. He invented two female characters who became the objects of his passion. "I took delight," he wrote,

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[xxi] Ibid., 440-41.

[xxii] Ibid., 441-42.

> in adorning them with all the charms of the sex which I have always adored . . . I bestowed on them two analogous, but different characters; two faces, not perfect, but after my taste, lighted up by kindliness and sensibility. I made one dark, the other fair; one lively, the other gentle; one prudent, the other weak, but with so touching a weakness, that virtue seemed to gain by it. I gave to one a lover, whose tender friend the other was, and even something more.

Rousseau cast himself in the part of the lover. But he made himself, in his imagination, "younger, more amiable, bestowing upon this imaginary self, in addition, the virtues and defects which I was conscious of in myself."[xxiii]

Rousseau's love life of the imagination spared him the complications of a real relationship. He thus protected his domestic arrangements with Therese and avoided any hint of public scandal. For physical release, it seems he engaged in his lifelong habit of masturbation. But his dream world was still prone to trouble. In short order, his imagination threatened to consume him altogether, particularly when he was confined to the house during the winter.

> I saw everywhere nothing but my two charming friends, their friend, their surroundings, the country in which they lived, the objects which my fancy created or embellished for them. I no longer belonged to myself for a single moment. My delirium never left me. After several fruitless attempts to banish all these imaginary creations from my mind, I became at last completely seduced by them, and all my efforts were thenceforth devoted to reducing them to some sort of order and coherence, in order to work them up into a kind of romance.[xxiv]

The result would be his novel, *Julie or the New Heloise*. But Rousseau's sojourn in the world of pure fantasy taught him a few real-life lessons.

[xxiii] Ibid., 442-44.

[xxiv] Ibid., 449.

One was that as he withdrew further and further into the life of his own imagination, he became, paradoxically, less himself. As he explains, "I no longer belonged to myself for a single moment." A daydream is, after all, a form of alienation from one's actual existence. Rousseau says, too, that his "fantastic amours" might have had "fatal consequences" had he not been pulled back into physical reality. He learned through this experience that the subjective imagination is not quite satisfied with itself. It seeks an object in the physical world. For Rousseau, this object appeared in Madame d'Houdetot, a woman in her thirties who galloped over to the Hermitage on horseback to make his acquaintance. "I saw my Julie in Madame d'Houdetot," says Rousseau, "and soon I saw only Madame d'Houdetot, but invested with all the perfections with which I had just adorned the idol of my heart." Madame d'Houdetot, though, was in love with another man and was therefore beyond Rousseau's reach. "Alas," he says, "it was very hard for me, to be consumed by a passion, as violent as it was unfortunate, for a woman whose heart was full of love for another!"

The most important lesson Rousseau seems to have taken from his attempt to exist wholly within his own imagination is that while the demands of the imagination must be satisfied, an object in the world of sense is also eventually required. Coleridge temporarily solved this difficulty with narcotics, which allowed him to make his daydreams as tactile as the physical world itself. But Rousseau's experience at the Hermitage demonstrated that to leave the imagination completely to itself is to risk madness. The danger of not employing reason to check imagination is pervasive throughout Rousseau's whole life and in his final years resulted in crippling paranoia. He began to see enemies everywhere, particularly in those who tried to help him, such as David Hume. Rousseau's life and later Coleridge's demonstrate that reason is the balance wheel between the world of the imagination, which seeks emotional satisfaction, and the objective world of perception. To achieve even the semblance of happiness, a person must keep all three attributes of mind—imagination, emotion, and reason—balanced in a sort of Aristotelean harmony.

The philosophy born from Rousseau's sexual experiences influenced nearly every facet of Western civilization, from gender relationships to

politics, but it has been most strongly manifested in the arts, the area in which Romanticism was first most keenly felt. If human happiness requires, as Rousseau asserts, emotional satisfaction, then it might well be held that the aim of any art must be to provide such satisfaction. Some might argue that the aim of art is not happiness at all, but insight, awareness, truth. But, Rousseau might counter by asking what good are insight, awareness, and truth, if they do not tend toward or at least hold out the promise of happiness?

Emotion, Rousseau believed, was central to the arts, particularly to music, which he held to be the highest of the arts. As far as he was concerned, music was the expression of emotion or it was meaningless. This was not an opinion that found favor with the elite composers of eighteenth-century France, and it launched Rousseau into one of his greatest public controversies well before he had ever laid eyes on the Hermitage.

Rousseau's principal antagonist in this contretemps was Jean-Philippe Rameau, the leading French composer of the time. Rameau was a devotee of Enlightenment thought. In his view, science had revealed a rationally ordered universe, and music, as an expression of what was universal, ought therefore to be an expression of rationality. There were unchanging laws governing music, just as there were governing the physical world. So said Rameau. These musical laws could best be observed in the harmonious relationships between tones. There were "natural harmonies," and the rational arrangement of these in musical structures was at the heart of all that was worthy in music. Harmony, then, was the key element in music because it was only through the ordered relationship of notes that rational structure could be expressed.[xxv]

The problem with Rameau's argument is that there can be no harmony at all without an act of imagination. Some line of notes or even of chords must be established to which other notes may be added as harmony. Rousseau held that melody is the most important part of any musical composition. It was the melody that provided the interesting changes, the flow and force of the music. In this regard, music could mimic the

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[xxv] Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 7.

changes in nature, which are constant and measured by time. Moreover, it is the melody, says Rousseau, that expresses human feeling, which really is the whole point.[xxvi]

As Maurice Cranston has written, the dispute between Rameau and Rousseau was more than an argument over music theory. It was really a disagreement about the nature of reality.

> For Rameau, reality was the Newtonian universe accessible to reason; for Rousseau it was the concrete world of perception.[xxvii]

In his debate with Rameau, Rousseau seems to be anticipating the British philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Perception of the world is all we really have to go on. And as Descartes showed, this perception of ours is notoriously faulty. Moreover, as Rousseau seems to be saying, and as Coleridge will say outright, any perception of physical reality is colored by, indeed must be influenced by, the inner life of the mind.[xxviii] We perceive through imagination and through an emotional instrument. Emotion shapes our understanding of the physical world.

Rousseau's insistence on the significance of feeling also elevated the individual, the particular, over the general and public, the subjective over the objective. As Cranston notes:

> Where Rameau, in his Cartesian manner, demanded unity, Rousseau was content with variety; where Rameau looked for fixed rules in music as in mathematics, Rousseau insisted that music was logically different from mathematics, and that musical styles must vary as nature varied. It was the marvelous gift of melody that could express what was natural, whereas harmony was essentially artificial, an invention of the mind.[xxix]

[xxvi] Ibid., 7-9.

[xxvii] Ibid., 8.

[xxviii] James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 329-38; James Engell, "Introduction" in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2 vols., eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 1:xcv; Daniel Weeks, *A More Prosaic Light: Essays, Revisions, and Reviews*, 1987-2015 (Eatontown, N.J.: Coleridge Institute Press, 2015), 77-78, 91-93.

Rousseau was well aware, though, that nature is not purely external to the individual. Our understanding is filtered through the mind and elicits an emotional response. This subjective element could give infinite variety to music.[xxx]

Rousseau, then, elevated both imagination and emotion to an understandable and important place in human affairs. His arguments in this regard still ring true, so it is interesting to remark how far feeling has been banished from public life. Emotion seems to be suspect, and anyone who shows any passion, even justifiable outrage, is often automatically disqualified from holding any position of power in government or business. Of course, no one would want to have someone who is guided by passion alone in control of a nation or major institution. But emotion may play an important role in leadership. After all, passion is an excellent motivator. Outrage gets things done. "Touch me with noble anger!" was Lear's cry when he finally understood his betrayal. He needed the anger and the energy it gave him so he could fight back.

Recent scholarship has supported Rousseau's contention that emotion plays an understandable and even vital role in human affairs. In *Passions Within Reason*, economist Robert H. Frank has shown that emotion can be an important survival skill, which allows us to overcome short-term, rational self-interest. Emotion can push us to take irrational actions that might have long-term beneficial consequences. For instance, a person who is known to retaliate against others when the cost of retaliation outweighs the initial injury will gain a reputation that will protect him or her from future attacks. Emotion also plays a role, says Frank, in helping us to determine when a person is sincere. Anger is hard to fake and therefore can signal when someone truly believes in a cause or opinion. We also tend to trust those who, because they wish to avoid guilty feelings, go out of their way to "do the right thing" even when it costs more materially.[xxxi]

[xxx] Nowhere is this embodied so much as in works such as the first movement of Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony," which seems to describe a landscape of the inner life of the mind and to defy the outworn conventions of the eighteenth century.

[xxxi] Robert H. Frank, Passions within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions (New York: W.W. Norton Co. 1988), 5.

[xxix] Cranston, The Romantic Movement, 8.

Moreover, says Frank, the survival of society itself seems to be dependent upon actions—charity, compassion, self-sacrifice—that might seem wholly irrational to the self-interested materialist. Rousseau would say these kinds of actions spring from empathy, which is itself an emotion born out of one's imaginative ability to put oneself in another's predicament.[xxxii]

As Frank tells us in his preface, emotion sometimes succeeds in adding to the bottom line in cases where pure self-interested reason fails:

> I make use of an idea from economics to suggest how noble human tendencies might not only have survived the ruthless pressures of the material world, but actually have been nurtured by them. The idea rests on a simple paradox, namely, that in many situations the conscious pursuit of self-interest is incompatible with its attainment. We are all comfortable with the notion that someone who strives to be spontaneous can never succeed. So too, on brief reflection, will it become apparent that someone who always pursues self-interest is doomed to fail.[xxxiii]

Frank points out that any characterization of humanity which discounts emotion poses a danger to society and therefore to all of the individuals who make up society. In this regard, he is following closely the argument that Rousseau and the Romantics made. A majority of modern biologists and behavioral scientists, says Frank, hold the view that humans are motivated only by narrow self-interest. In this kind of a world, we might expect that deceit and aggression would prevail. This is the world of fascism. But the fascists lost, didn't they? The problem for those who sharply pursue rational self-interest, Frank notes, is that they are untrustworthy and signal this to others in spite of their attempts to disguise themselves. It is much more difficult for the self-interested person to make long-term personal relationships or to commit themselves sufficiently to a cause, both of which seem necessary to success in society. In fact, the person who is completely self-interested exhibits a psychopathic personality. As Frank tells us, "the

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[xxxii] Ibid., 253-57.

[xxxiii] Ibid., ix-x.

psychopath fails not because of an inability to calculate self-interest, but because of an inability to empathize, a fundamental lack of emotional conditionability."[xxxiv] And as Rousseau noted, empathy, which is one of the threads that holds society together, springs from the imagination—we put ourselves imaginatively in the place of another.

In Coleridgean fashion, Frank cautions that accepting the view of humanity now prevalent among scientists may have dire consequences. What sets us apart from the rest of nature, Coleridge argued, is our ability to imaginatively create ourselves anew. Our ideas have consequences in the material world. Frank agrees:

> Our beliefs about human nature help shape human nature itself. What we think about ourselves and our possibilities determines what we aspire to become; and it shapes what we teach our children, both at home and in the schools. Here the pernicious effects of the self-interest theory have been most disturbing. It tells us that to behave morally is to invite others to take advantage of us. By encouraging us to expect the worst in others, it brings out the worst in us; dreading the role of the chump, we are often loath to heed our nobler instincts.[xxxv]

Frank, following up on the findings of other researchers, such as Jerome Kagan, says that moral behavior is motivated less by reason than by emotion. As Kagan noted in his 1984 book *The Nature of the Child*:

Construction of a persuasive rational basis for behaving morally has been the problem on which most moral philosophers have stubbed their toes. I believe they will continue to do so until they recognize what Chinese philosophers have known for a long time: namely, feeling, not logic, sustains the superego.[xxxvi]

Society only works when most people behave morally most of the time. It is built upon trust and virtuous behavior. In so many spheres

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[xxxiv] Ibid., 255.

[xxxv] Ibid., xi.

[xxxvi] Jerome Kagan, *The Nature of the Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 155.

of human activity, this idea is now lost. Management theorists think businesses and administrative organizations can be structured without regard to the character of the people who will work in them. Since the workers can't be trusted, a level of management has to be devised to keep tabs on what the workers are doing. But since the lower-level management can't be trusted either, a middle tier of management has to be constructed. Who then will keep an eye on the mid-level managers? Why upper management of course—Kenneth Lay, Charles Fastow, Bernie Evers, Bernard Madoff, and Martin Shkreli. In the end, these businesses fail because no one is trustworthy, nor are they expected to be. The long-term result of such behavior will be the utter destruction not only of Enron, Worldcom, and Lehman Brothers but of the economy itself, as we experienced in 2008.

Still, moral behavior has the seeds of self-interest in it. Socrates, in his defense before the court of Athens, was the exemplar of this kind of thinking. When he was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens, he replied that it would be unwise for him to have done so because he was a citizen of Athens and would therefore become a victim of their corruption.[xxxvii] Rousseau thought that very few people could be motivated by such forethought. It takes an act of imagination to see how one's single immoral act tears at the gigantic fabric of society. Most people, Rousseau seems to argue, are rather thoughtless. They must, therefore, be educated to practice virtue and patriotism without thinking too much about it. If they start to use reason, they will undermine the very fictions that hold society together. Society, then, say Rousseau and Frank, depends for its very existence on morality, emotion, and imagination. If we rely solely on rational self-interest, we will soon cast ourselves into the fire of the war of all on all. Whether that Hobbesian world of natural man ever existed before seems to be beside the point. We could create it for ourselves simply because we can no longer imagine any other kind of world.

[xxxvii] Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse, eds., W. H. D. Rouse, trans., *The Great Dialogues of Plato* (New York: New American Library, 1984), 430-32.

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Leaves
float back up to the branch--
Ah! butterflies.

He runs the micro-publishing house BLAST PRESS, which has published over two dozen authors in the past 25 years. He still composes poems on his departed father's clipboard, which he's had since High School. He is a two-time Asbury Park Poet Laureate awarded by the Asbury Music Awards.

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