

ANTIC ANTILLEANA

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HERE'S LIVING LARGE AT YOU, KID
An instructive sonnet in blank verse for
RRS

To live large is the natural human
impulse,
It is what sets us apart.
To live large is to take risks
In pursuit of the really big prize.
Those who live large cannot be bought
off,
Because we want everything.

Waking large in the morning
Is to rise with raging appetites.
Reflecting large at midday
Is a state of satisfaction while wanting
more, much much more.
Gliding large and high in the all-day
afternoon
Is the rarified way to live.
And the sudden shift of dusk when one is
living large
Is a permanent revolution of the soul.

Wandering

RUSSIA

We think of the old Soviet Union as mired
in bureaucracy, but you mustn't imagine
that bureaucracy was invented by Joseph
Stalin. He just built on a Russian tendency
that was well established long before

1917. And it continues today. When I
was preparing to go there in mid-2003 for
a social insects symposium, I knew that I
would get my visa, but it took some doing
and came through just in time.

The symposium leader, Vladilen
Kipyatkov, and his assistant, Dmitri
Dubovikov, were there to meet me at the
Poltava airport. As we rode into town, it
was such a hoot to look around and read
the signs. I was surprised at the number
of them that I could figure out, and my
mental pronunciation of the words
seemed to pick up just during that short
trip. At one point Vladilen pointed to a
prominent monument in front of us and
said it was in commemoration of the
victory over Napoleon. But the dates
were wrong, so I looked through the
inscription and politely suggested that it
might, in fact, not refer to Napoleon but to
the Turks. He affably admitted that I was
right.

As we checked in at my hotel, I
noticed that the security guard at the front
was from the Okhrana company. Now, I
believe "okhrana" means protection, but it
was also the name of the tsarist secret
police. I have to wonder if this is another
symptom of what seems to be a
widespread nostalgia for that period.

Having gotten me settled, Vladilen
and his assistant had to rush off to do a
zillion things. They pointed me to a

nearby supermarket, as I figured I would get some supplies. It is always such a gas to be among people with whom one has no common language. To listen to their strange sounds and interpret utterly without restraint. And it was great fun to roam the aisles and read the labels. I got some sardines, cheese, pickles -- the grape leaves and dill gave confidence that these would not be some wretched sweet ones -- black olives, rye bread and beer. At a sidewalk fruit stand outside I stopped for half a kilo of ordinary purple plums. Ah, that's my rich substance.

The hotel is at one end of Vasil'evskii Ostrov -- Vasili's Island; no one seems to know who Vasili was -- between the Bol'shaya Neva, Malaya Neva and the Gulf of Finland. Our meeting venue, the St Petersburg University (est. 1724) is at the other end, about 5 km away. There are two subway stations on the island, Primorskaya within convenient walking distance of the hotel and Vasileostrovskaya not far from the university. That gave me two pleasant commuting options each day.

I never got tired of either of these. The walk leads through a sprawling, almost forested cemetery. And an outstanding feature of Leningrad subway stations is the very long escalators, to which I am partial. The subway system is moderately extensive, and any trip costs just 7 rubles, so it is a cheap way to explore. Two of the stations open onto the famous Nevskii Prospekt, always good for a stroll.

I had arrived a couple of days ahead of the symposium, so this is exactly the kind of exploring I did. Coming home on the first day, I came out of the Primorskaya station and, taking a novel turn, I came upon an open market with several fruit stalls. One of them had dried figs, so I handed over a 20-ruble note and

pointed to them. The really attractive thing about these figs was that they had yellowjackets all over them. I had a vial in my pocket, and the figwife -- don't worry if you haven't heard this term before; I just made it up -- made no objection when I collected a couple of her wasps. At another stall I got a box of black-tea bags. The figs went very well with a glass of tea.

The next day I was no longer on my own, as the colleagues were pouring in from all over. Raghavendra Gadagkar, Paul Schmid-Hempel, Manuela Giovanetti and I formed a sight-seeing group, with our main destination the Peter & Paul Fortress.

There are several features in that complex, so we were selective. First, the cathedral, in which all of the Romanov tsars -- everyone from Peter I onward -- are buried, if I understood right. One tries to appreciate different viewpoints, but to an ethnic Quaker the whole place is vulgarly ornate, quite apart from glorification of those wretched parasites. The names on the tombs were in stylized writing, which Paul and I had fun deciphering, but other than that it was a massive gross-out.

Then to the political prison. Outside most of the cells was a picture and biographic sketch of a former inmate, of whom I recognized just two, Aleksandr Ulyanov and Maksim Gorkii. The door to Ulyanov's cell was open, so I paid my respects by stepping inside his last earthly home. Then we walked around the ramparts outside, which give a good view of the Neva. Incidentally, in that famous statue of Peter I that is sort of a symbol of Leningrad both of his horse's front legs are off the ground; Peter died of illness, and as far as I know he was never even wounded in battle, so please don't let me hear any of you relating that silly code

about equestrian statues.

The symposium was excellent, a very fruitful event, and the organizers had the sense to take advantage of the wonderful venue by including a couple of bus tours. The second of these was out into the countryside to the village of Pushkin, formerly Tsarskoe Selo, seat of the summer palace. Now, our English-speaking guide for each tour was one Natasha, who by this time was really getting on my nerves with her incessant talk. It was partly her fascination with things aristocratic, partly the huge number of trivial details she felt obliged to impart to us, partly her tendency to belabour the obvious, but most of all I regretted Natasha's disinclination ever to shut up. She especially went on and on about the Amber Room that we would see in the palace, so that by the time we got to it I was already damn sick of it.

At the palace, a Russian-speaking staff guide was assigned to the few among us who did not prefer English, while Natasha took the rest. Seeing my opportunity, I quickly moved over to the Russian group and had a fun tour. Aside from affording me some Natasha-relief, I got to listen to all that lovely language from our guide, and I made out enough words (at least one in 20, I estimate) that I fancied that I could actually follow some of it.

After the palace tour we all had an extensive stroll about the grounds. The leaves were falling from the hardwood trees. Not as colourful as the Gatineau Hills, but not entirely drab either. I picked up a fair number of fallen maple and beech leaves, which I pressed in a notebook for later distribution to the deserving.

Then we piled back into the bus and headed for the banquet at the nearby village of Pavlovsk. The food was both

good and very ethnic. I especially went for the pickled garlic, a lot of it, which undoubtedly rendered me even more fragrant than usual for the next couple of days. There were soup bowls at each table, and I publicly hoped that the soup would be borshch, so that I was in a state of open celebration when it turned out to be just that.

After the main consumption had passed and we were moving into more of a social phase, Vladilen rose to inform us that at a Russian banquet a plethora of toasts is in order. Well, I was ready for that. I had brought along some CDs of Trinidadian music as gifts, and when I figured it was my turn I rose to make a pretty little speech and present one of them to Vladilen. Then similar expressions of gratitude and admiration, together with a gift-wrapped CD, for Vladilen's boss, Elena Lopatina (i.e. Mrs Kipyatkova). Finally, my long-time friend by correspondence, Lidiya Rusina, whom I had met for the first time in person at this symposium. Yes, indeed, there's a time for keeping it plain and simple, and there's a time for spreading it on thick.

On our last meeting day, Vladilen announced that the organizers had saved some time and money through rearrangements in the programme, so that a one-day field trip out into the taiga, or boreal forest, was planned for the next day. I was eager for just such a trip, as were many others. Besides, this was a purely scientific excursion, so no Natasha.

We had a close call as we got started. Elena raised the question of lunch and proposed that we lay on some American fast food. Then she mentioned MacDonald's. Now, I know what it's like when you're organizing an event and participants capriciously object to your arrangements, but this was too monstrously bad an idea. I turned around

from where I was sitting in the front and looked at the people. It certainly appeared to me like they, too, thought it was a lousy idea, but they needed some encouragement to express themselves. "You're kidding, right?" I said to no one in particular, and still the people buttoned their lips, so what could I do? "But what about the vegetarians?" Elena asked. "Bread and cheese" I called out, and others murmured assent, so Elena said bread and cheese it was.

That was the turning point. I announced that I had decided to be a vegetarian for today, and several others chimed in with the same idea, and Elena was not slow in seeing that MacDonald's was not on the agenda, after all. Educated people don't go all the way to a distant country to eat MacDonald's, I can tell you that. So Vladilen and Dmitri went and got a bunch of bread and cheese and ham and beer and made us all open-faced sandwiches, and lunch turned out to be a very satisfying affair, after all. As far as I am aware, Fernando Noll was the only real vegetarian on the bus, so thank you very much, Fernando.

We had a two- or three-hour drive through pleasant country to the village where the Kipyatkovs have a summer house, then a fine stroll through their field site on the taiga. The ground below the trees was incredibly spongy with moss, and I kept coming back to the same thought: This is all so utterly Russian. I was in a state of exaltation.

What I had most wanted to see in the field was a mound of wood ants, any member of the *Formica rufa* group. Within minutes of getting into real taiga I found just such a colony and was able to examine the nest and watch the ants. Later I realized that that was quite a bit of luck, as I didn't see another, and Vladilen later told me that until recently there had

been none at that site. Others in our group showed me some other characteristic north-temperate ants, including *Lasius flavus*, *L. niger* and *Myrmica ruginodis*. Also plenty of crows and a woodpecker. I had always thought of crows as mainly or entirely glossy black, but this species was gray all over except the head, wings and legs.

I believe it was that evening that I was proselytized. Walking from Primoskaya to the hotel I was approached by two dear little old ladies with tracts in their hands. I saw immediately what it was about. Now, I get proselytized several times a year, but it is almost always here in the West Indies by irony-free black people. I commonly point out to them that they should be ashamed of themselves, pushing the message of the slave-holders like that, and that they might like to show a little gumption and shake off those shackles, but none has yet shown proper appreciation for this intelligence.

I let the dear ladies open their discourse and then informed them ever so courteously that I could not speak Russian. (They had the good sense not to object that I was speaking Russian and could almost certainly hear my foreign accent.) I figured I was off the hook and prepared to depart. Not so fast. One of the ladies asked if I could read Russian. I gravely assured her that I could not, and waited for them to wish say goodbye, but they weren't done yet. Where did I come from? they asked, and I told them I was from Trinidad & Tobago. Seeing that the place was unfamiliar to them, I noted that it is in South America.

And what language do you speak there? they wanted to know. I thought this was quite harmless and readily told them that we speak English. "Ah, Angliskii" one of them said with a note of enthusiasm, as she sorted intently

through her tracts. Oh no, I thought, she's got some of these things in English. As it happened, she didn't, but she did find the name and address of the bible society in English on one of them, which she drew to my attention before presenting me with it. I had been that close to a clean getaway. With the help of a dictionary, I later read the title of her gift and then considered myself absolved from having to read any more of it.

Almost all the foreign colleagues were gone the next morning, but I stayed in Leningrad for a couple more days. There was a good reason for this. The opportunistic moment in Aleksandr Ulyanov's cell was a sort of little pilgrimage, and it was now time for a day of more serious pilgrimaging. I had brought along two main reading matters, neither of which I had read in many years, Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station* and John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, and I meant to visit the Finland Station and the Smol'ny Institute before I left.

The Finland Station is evidently much enlarged and modernized, so that it isn't the same place as it was in 1917, but it was still a pleasure to be in the very place.

The locomotive -- quite a dinky little thing -- is on display, but it was out on the platform, and one needed a ticket to go there, so I just looked at it from a distance.

In the park out front I took a couple of pictures of a large statue of Vladimir Ilyich with the station in the background.

Then it was a long walk over a bridge, followed by an even longer walk along drab Shpalernaya Prospekt to the Smol'ny Institute. It was a Sunday, so that I couldn't go in, but I got a good look at the front part of it. There is an attractive life-size statue of Vladimir Ilyich in front of the building. And in the park that fronts the insitute are large busts of Marx and

Engels, facing each other across a pathway. They are very well executed, and Marx looks just like himself, but the sculptor seems not to have realized that Engels had quite a different personality, as he got the same facial expression. I stopped to pick up just one commemorative maple leaf in the park.

Then a long, long walk along Sovorovskii Prospekt to Nevskii Prospekt and on to the Gostiny Dvor station. There was a fair-sized leisure-time crowd about, so I got a large beer and drank it while watching the people. I hadn't eaten in over six hours, so I was definitely somewhat drunk when I rode the long escalator down into the station. And as I approached the bottom and saw the mass of people on both sides of the platform, waiting for trains in both directions, I found myself in a sudden state of exaltation. There was no evident reason for this. There didn't have to be.

Some days earlier I had finished Edmund Wilson's book and was deep into John Reed's. That night I read some more of it before retiring. What a thrill to re-read his account at a time when I had just become personally acquainted with the streets and buildings in which those decisive events took place. There is a passage in which Reed and his crew come out of the Smol'ny Institute and hitch a ride that takes them roaring up Sovorovksii Prospekt to Nevskii Prospekt to near the Winter Palace, and as I read it that night I was inwardly raving "Holy jumping! I know those places. I walked those streets with my own feet just this morning." It was a dazzling experience in living history.

Since then I have been in a major slavic period. In the evening I usually read a story by Chekhov while drinking a glass of vodka, and then I listen to my Russian tapes for a while. I'm making

slow progress in the latter, but there is hope that I may actually be acceptably fluent around about the time I die. In the distant future.

MADELEINE MOMENTS AND WHAT THEY'RE MADE OF

The one thing that everyone knows from Marcel Proust is the the scene in which the sight and smell of a madeleine biscuit dunked into a cup of tea in a café brings on a flood of memories and associations. Even those who have never read anything by Proust are familiar with it, and I must confess that I'm unsure whether I have read that passage, myself, or only know it from having read about it so often.

This scene is famous because it speaks to us. We have all had similar experiences. On a visit to Canada many years ago I stepped into a diner and was shaken by the smell of vinegar over french fries, so evocative of my youth in the Ottawa Valley. And just the other day I came upon leafcutter ants chewing up a fallen guava fruit; and I was assailed by memories of a magnificent day-long ramble in Costa Rica many years ago. Sudden sensations can do that to you.

In honour of Proust, we will call such happenings "madeleine moments". (I have no doubt that professional psychologists have already come up with a standard term of their own, something multisyllabic and obscure, designed to mystify something that is, in fact, common human experience; that term, whatever it may be, merits our profoundest indifference.)

So, send me your madeleine moments. I refer here not to ordinary recurring associations but to particular incidents. And, to be truly madeleine, it must take you by surprise. Send them to

me, and I will send them out to the faithful. I know you partake of the human condition. Now I just want to know exactly how.

FIFTY THINGS TO DO BEFORE I DIE

A while ago the Internet had a piece on this very topic. They were mostly pretty lame, but I warmed up to the idea and jotted down notes toward my own list. This includes some things that I had already done (asterisked), but it is rather shocking to see that these are a distinct minority.

- 1.*Visit Cuba (twice, and I'm ready to go again)
- 2.Visit Socotra (positively one of the ends of the Earth)
- 3.Run before the bulls in Pamplona (right after the sun also rises)
- 4.Snorkel in a coral reef
- 5.*Go up into the rain-forest canopy
- 6.*Go up Mt Kinabalu
- 7.Go up Mt Ventoux
- 8.*Take an extended canoe trip
- 9.Walk about in the Carpathians
- 10.Wander in the Andes for a month
- 11.Spend a fortnight in welshest Wales
- 12.Live among african Pygmies or philippine Negritos
- 13.Ride a camel in horizon-to-horizon desert
- 14.*Ride (hobo) a freight train
- 15.Ride the Orient Express to Istanbul
- 16.*Visit the Finland Station
- 17.*Visit Fabre's Harmas
- 18.Visit Darwin's house
- 19.See Freud's plaque (one of two reasons to go to Vienna)
- 20-21. See Vermeer's **View of Delft* and *The Art of Painting* (the latter is the second reason to visit Vienna; I am

- unaware of any others)
- 22-25. Hear *B.B. King, Boukman Eksperyans, Miriam Makeba, and *Sun Ra in person
 26. Get a saxophone and learn to swing it
 27. *Get a motorcycle
 28. Learn to juggle three and four balls
 29. *Drink african palm wine
 30. Produce my own african palm wine
 31. *Eat an ostrich egg (thank you very much, Peter Witt)
 32. Eat an opossum (just like the bumper sticker says)
 33. Read a whole book in Italian (probably Umberto Eco's *Il Nome della Rosa*)
 34. Learn to speak Russian passably well (as Robert DeNiro said to Anne Heche in *Wag the Dog*, I'm working on it)
 35. *Publish a paper in *Maledicta*
 36. Watch *Argyroneta aquatica*, the european aquatic spider
 37. Hear and smell a wild jaguar
 - 38-45. See live colonies of *weaver ants, *New World army ants, *african driver ants, *red wood ants, *giant honey bees, *hover wasps, **Belonogaster* wasps and *fungus-gardening termites (no question about it, it's been a very good life so far)
 46. *Get stung by a hornet
 47. Get possessed at a vodou ceremony (I've been shaking it off, but sooner or later it has to happen)
 48. *Paint a mural
 49. Sculpt african-style wooden masks
 50. Make love with an Egyptian woman.

A Reader's Notes

MISCELLANEOUS

In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782), as in his other

autobiographical books, his persecution complex gets a great deal of play here. Complaints such as "The greatest concern of those who control my fate has been to keep me entirely surrounded by false and deceptive appearances, any occasion for virtuous behavior being never more than a bait to empty me into the trap they have laid for me." quickly lose their interest. Still, the book has an engaging premise, and some parts are quite appealing. I especially liked the long passage on botany.

I look forward eagerly to the next volume of *Maledicta*, one of my favourite journals. After a long delay, my paper with Mark Thomas on west-indian bathroom graffiti is in it, among other delights. It was the editor, Reinhold Aman -- affectionately known as Uncle Maledictus -- who helped me to define my identity many years ago when he referred to me as "that old bug-watcher". I guess he was in a mellow mood that day, because more recently I find him addressing me as "Dear Freudian Commie Dog-Eater". It just goes to show you, but what?

Dave Wahl up and sent me D.A.F. de Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*. Besides the title book, it includes some shorter works by Sade and a couple of critical essays, including Simone de Beauvoir's "Must We Burn Sade?" Dave remarked that he found the book quite tedious, and Hans Boos regards Sade's longer works as unreadable, but I am taking the view that one can get the idea from reading the descriptions of a few kinds of buggery and then quite merrily skip over the next hundred or so to the point where the book changes gears.

A couple of inquiries for the literati out there.

First, many years ago I came upon mention of the Norse wolf Fenris, who ostensibly was captured through use of "the breath of fishes, the noise of a cat's footfall, and the roots of stones." This is immensely alluring, and I would like to look further into it. Bibliographic suggestions will be gratefully received. What about it, George Johnston?

The other is a little more complicated. In high school we were taught that one must have on tap three major sources in order to make sense of English literature: greek mythology, the Bible, and Shakespeare. Graduating reasonably familiar with these, I felt comfortable enough until one day in 1972. An IRA spokesman on a speaking tour was staying at the house, and in the evening we relaxed by listening to Dylan Thomas reading his own. Hearing the declaimed phrase "O miracle of fishes" in "The Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait", Seamus asked me what I thought it meant. Obviously an allusion to the miracle of loaves and fishes, I said. No, he said, nothing of the sort, it had to do with such-and-such a pre-Christian symbolic event. And then he went through other pieces of the poems we had heard, recasting in a similar way allusions to which I had automatically given Christian interpretation. The scales fell from my eyes, so I thought, and I embraced the belief that the English literature of Britain in addition drew substantially upon pre-Christian sources.

Now, I have serious doubts, based on looking again at Dylan Thomas. The two lines of evidence -- rather obvious if one will just look -- are that a) the poems are full of explicitly Christian imagery, including an unambiguous allusion to the miracle of loaves and fishes in another one, and b) I detect no strong historical or cultural-nationalist tendency in Thomas,

no sense of having been shaped by things that went long before his birth (which is why, incidentally, it's such a joke that he thought he could be a communist).

Surely there's somebody out there who can help me out on this. George Johnston, would you care to take care of this one, too, while you're at it?

Edwin Way Teale in *Autumn Across America* (p288):

"An editor had sent me from New York to a chicken farm on the edge of a small New Jersey village. One of the men who fed poultry there was reported to have the oddest collection of musical instructions on earth. I found him, a patriarchal old gentleman with mild flue eyes. He explained quite simply that he saw visions and that once, years before, he had watched 126 angels, each playing a different musical instruction. He had set out to reproduce on earth all the instruments he had seen. We examined a score or more he had completed: fiddles with three necks instead of one, a harp so huge it could be played from a second-story window, violins with crooked necks and extra strings, harps and fiddles combined. All of his instruments had been turned out with no special training and with the use of ordinary carpenter tools. Yet one of his smaller violins, he told me, because of the sweetness of its tone had sold for \$500. Afterwards I checked with the owner and found this was true. The wood that went into all these instruments came from a common lumber yard. But the instrument maker believed he was guided to certain boards, ones that rang like a bell when he thumped them. All the resonance and beauty of tone in the finished product, he maintained, was inherent in the fibers of the wood."

I haven't been able to find anything

further about those instruments.

Suetonius's book on the Caesars is a jolly good read. The sections on Julius and Augustus are enlightening, and there is great fun in reading about the more degenerate rulers, Tiberius (in later life), Caligula, Claudius, and everyone's favourite, Nero. Chapter XXII of Caligula opens very gracefully with "So much for Caligula as emperor; we must now tell of his career as a monster." And three chapters later we learn that "It is not easy to decide whether he acted more basely in contracting his marriages, in annulling them, or as a husband." In the section on Claudius we are told that he had the Jews expelled from Rome because Christus was encouraging them to be troublesome; evidently a chronological mistake, as that would have been during Tiberius's reign.

Nero was of course the one who first undertook sustained persecution of that particular sect: "Punishment was inflicted upon the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."

Summary of W. Somerset Maugham's *On Human Bondage*: A young fellow is madly enamoured of a woman of no discernible attractiveness. He whines and dines her, repeatedly. She does him dirty. Repeatedly. The end.

I suppose one has to be English to really appreciate it.

Your editor continues in the shameful habit of reading folktales at all hours, especially those hours during which he has a contract with the taxpayers of the English-speaking Caribbean to do something else. One of recent perusal, a rambling african tale with a title that belongs more properly on a movie instead -- *Ten Girls Who Went to Pick Ocuga* -- in which the tortoise saves the leading lady

from a dragon or Odinga Oginga or somebody, has a most satisfying ending.

She asked the tortoise: "What can I do to thank you?"

Tortoise replied: "Bring me a basket of mushrooms, and stop being foolish."

I came upon a soft-core pornographic novel by one Dot Starr, titled *Hotel Aphrodisia* (London: X Libris). Now, my late mother, Dorothy S. Starr, wrote fiction and was known on her side of the family as "Dot", but pornography? I had to check it out. So I read enough to find references to faxes and a laptop computer. Those things weren't around while my mother was alive, although the other stuff in the book was, if you see what I mean.

Amos Tutuola is no longer with us. I, for one, will certainly miss him.

Peter Kropotkin's autobiography book is important stuff andt very engagingly written, with a good sense of punch line. Two excerpts:

"It often happens that men pull in a certain political, social, or familiar harness simply because they never have time to ask themselves whether the position they stand in and the work they accomplish are right; whether their occupations really suit their inner desires and capacities and give them the satisfaction which every one has the right to expect from his work.

Active men are especially liable to find themselves in such a position. Every day brings with it a fresh batch of work, and a man throws himself into his bed late at night without having completed what he had expected to do; then in the morning he hurries to the unfinished task of the previous day. Life goes on, and there is no time left to think, no time to consider the direction that one's life is taking, So it was

with me."

"Later, the soldiers of the guard made quite a legend of that visit. The person who came in a carriage to carry me away at the time of my escape ... bore a faint resemblance to the Grand Duke Nicholas. So a tradition grew up amongst the soldiers of the St. Petersburg garrison that it was the grand duke himself who came to rescue me. Thus are legends created even in times of newspapers and biographical dictionaries."

Maxim Gorki's *Fragments from My Diary* knocked me out. I don't know where he got that title, unless it's a mistranslation. It doesn't have much about Gorki and his life, as it's really a set of character sketches and encounters. The book is really about the Russian people, and I found it positively gripping. On reflection, I see that I responded to his letting me feel what it was like to be among people like that, to be in a different place. Although it isn't fiction, this book is effectively a collection of short stories, and I embraced it for the same reason I embrace some other short-story writers from other places when they show me what it's like. Sean O'Faolain in Ireland, sometimes William Henry Hudson and Jorge Luis Borge in Argentina, some of the Nigerians, Naipaul in Trinidad, Alan Sillitoe in England.

William Empson, in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, contributes the following fine harangue:

"I shall now stop beating the Chaucerian bushes, and pursue my thesis in the very sanctuary of rationality. During the eighteenth century English poets were trying to be honest, straightforward, sensible, grammatical and plain; thus it is now my business to outwit these poor wretches, and to

applaud them for qualities in their writings which they would have been horrified to discover."

Oh yes, old Empson liked to mix it up. One is also charmed by his remark that "Hebrew, having very unreliable tenses, extraordinary idioms, and a strong taste for puns, possesses all the poetical advantages of a thorough primitive disorder."

Dreaming

MISCELLANEOUS

[Yes, I know that's two long miscellaneous features in a row, but what are you going to do, cancel your subscription? At least, I can assure you that these are real, accurate dreams, set forth with clinical detachment. If it will make you feel any better, you might try reading them out loud at a party when you are all stoned.]

In the last chapter of a long dream, I am taking Francis to school. We start out driving, attended by all sorts of obstacles and misdirections, and finally I park the car, and we set out to walk the rest of the way. The rules require that he be in a stroller for this last part, even though he is 10 years old.

We have only gone a short way with Francis in the stroller when I realize that the school is still a long way off. So we go back to get into the car and drive most of the remaining way. But I can't find the car. I had parked it in an unfamiliar part of the city (which city?), and it is rather dark out, so I am unsure if the car has been stolen or I have just lost the place. As we are going around in search of the car, we come upon a soccer-ball factory that is having a grand sale at practically give-away prices. We walk in and ask how many different kinds of soccer balls they

have, to which the answer is "About 7000." Fine, I say impulsively, we'll take one of each.

I awake as I am arranging payment and delivery for 7000 soccer balls. Now, what would Claude Reis have made of this?

I told this dream to Francis in the a.m., and he was properly appreciative. He then responded by telling me his own, which involved watching the shenanigans of a lot of cartoon greek gods, whom he named. The disquieting thing for him was that he didn't appear in the dream but just saw it played out in front of him.

[From a letter to Anne Hall, the first Mrs Starr]

A rather amazing dream just the other night, really quite bracing. I took notes of it in the a.m. Together with a female woman, I go into a movie theater. We sit down, and presently the movie starts, quite a vigorous show of uncertain theme. For a while I am unsure who my companion is. I somehow have the impression that it is Maite, but then a bright scene in the movie allows me to see that it is you. (I certainly reproach myself for having any difficulty telling one wife from another, quite inexcusable; I'm sure you never committed any such outrage with respect to Messrs Braun and Hall and me.)

You get up to go for popcorn or something, and while you are out two large, informal human beings come in and sit on either side of me. They are pretty raucous, and I can feel the back of the row of seats shake with their mirth. I am in a rather robust mood myself, so I don't object to the ruckus or even to the fact that one of them is in your seat.

Still, I'm not certain that these two new people are entirely honest roughnecks. I suspect that they are

checking me out for a mugging, but I'm feeling confident, ready to duke it out if it comes to that.

But then a sudden change comes over the theater. A church scene comes on the screen, Baptists in full cry, and the audience responds. The audience rises and swings into a hymn along with the movie congregation, and it is apparent from the dress of many of them that they are Caribbean-style Baptists, although I had the feeling that we were in Mexico. After a few moments of this, the screen goes blank, the lights go on, and an earnest young man jumps up on the stage and proceeds to preach from the pulpit that has miraculously appeared there.

At this point, the dream sort of fades out, as the walls of the theatre fall away and we find ourselves out in the wide wide world, like the ending of *Blazing Saddles*.

A rambling dream of driving about a strange town in a car with troublesome steering, together with a woman who might be Dyan Nelson and might have been sister Sushi or our mother. I go to bed in a room with a few bunk beds. The only other evident thing in the room beside me and the bunk beds is a sculpture on the upper bunk next to mine, formed from various artefacts. As I lie there having insomnia, I see something move on the dead statue. This thing resolves itself into a large solpugid (sun-spider), which then hops over onto my bed and walks off it. The whole time I am thinking "Hot damn, my first live solpugid."

I am cycling in what looks like the dutch countryside. Rain is coming on, so I am looking for a place to take shelter, when a vacation-dressed American on a houseboat hails me. "Hey, taste this shampoo" he calls out in a hearty american way, holding up a plate with a

sandwich on it. Well, one wants to rise to the occasion, so I park the bike and step from the shore onto the boat. The man and his equally vacation-dressed american wife are beaming as I step aboard. I seat myself and chomp on a section of the sandwich, as they eagerly await my judgement.

And I must say, it is positively the best shampoo sandwich I can ever recall having tasted. Nicely seasoned with some tangy relish, but not so spicy as to cover up the exquisite shampoo taste. I wake up just as I am waiting to swallow before telling them that I absolutely endorse their fine shampoo.
