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The Glory of the World

by CHARLES L. MEE

A man is sitting at a table with his back to us, listening, and his thoughts are projected on the walls.

Listen, it's raining

SILENCE

All of this ambient and low, all of it far away

SILENCE

SILENCE

SILENCE

SILENCE

SILENCE

SILENCE

There is a bubbling—metallic—behind me

SILENCE

SILENCE

SILENCE

Something whispers, slithers and then stops

SILENCE

SILENCE

SILENCE

SILENCE

Crunch of shoes on sidewalk
Like sound of peanuts being cracked

SILENCE
SILENCE
SILENCE
SILENCE
SILENCE

Door clicks behind very near

SILENCE

Door slam to the left
Door slam to the left
Car starting up on the left
Car driving away

SILENCE
SILENCE

Behind me a bike or an insect

SILENCE
SILENCE
SILENCE

Very faint yelp, first voice of any kind
It's a screeching sort of bark

SHORT PAUSE

And then some guys enter, holding glasses of bourbon, looking happily at one another.

EVERYONE SINGING
Happy Birthday to you
Happy Birthday to you

Happy Birthday, dear Thomas
Happy 100th birthday to you.

It is the most varied cast ever seen on a stage—varied by race, age, personal grooming, hair styles, costume, behavior—but all men:

Roland
Robert

Albert
Arnold

Benny
Bobby

Cameron
Conrad

and
a swimmer in a swimming suit
a basketball player
an electrician
a football player
a policeman
a truck driver
a waiter
a doctor
a couple guys with rifles
etc.
etc.
etc.

And one of them proposes a celebratory toast.

ALBERT
I'd like to propose a toast.
To the great Thomas Merton.
I mean, the reason I'm here
the reason I've come to this birthday party for Merton

is because Thomas Merton was such a guy for me
for my life
for how I've spent my entire life ever since
always thinking of him as I went forward
with his deep, deep commitment to peace
his adamant anti-war stance
his forthright engagement with the
great, profound, everlastingly important cause of world peace
his pacifism
which remains forever
an inspiration to us all.
So:

To Thomas Merton.

[all drink,

and

here in the beginning
even though they may disagree from time to time

everyone is being sociable and agreeable

for the sake of a nice party]

BENNY

I would like to propose a toast, too, if I may.

And, if I may,

I would propose a toast not to Merton's pacifism

I mean that's ok,

that's totally ok, but

I don't think Thomas Merton was

fundamentally

a great pacifist.

I'm here today because,

as a Buddhist,

he's been a great inspiration to me, too—

not for his commitment to worldly things

outside in the noise
well, the politics of the world
but for his commitment to solitude and meditation
to simply sitting in a room
and letting his mind and spirit roam
through thought and feeling
for being at peace with himself.
An impulse that drew him in to an engagement
with his deepest, most profound, quiet, isolated self,
and which, of course,
I acknowledge
if we all did the same
would result,
secondarily,
in pacifism.
To Thomas Merton.

ALL

To Thomas Merton.

CAMERON

If I may, I would like to propose a toast, too.
As with all of you,
Thomas Merton has been a great inspiration to me
for my entire life
and that is why I have come today,
to pay tribute to that.
And so I would like to offer a toast to Merton
not Merton the pacifist or the meditator in solitude—
which I think are not things that speak to his essential being really
but really,
if you want to get fundamentally to his fundamental heart and soul
underlying all he felt and believed and did
we really are speaking of the elements that actually precede
such things as pacifism and meditation
we are speaking of an engagement with the deep
underlying fundamentals
that are the cause of things that finally come to disturb
someone who also desires peace and quiet and meditation

that is to say
we are speaking of fundamental rightness
and goodness and justice in the world
in the air we breathe
and the culture we live in
and so
I would like to offer a toast
to Thomas Merton
the Communist.

CONRAD

Because, as Merton himself said,
“The peace the world pretends to desire
is really no peace at all.
To some men,
peace merely means the liberty to exploit other people
without fear of retaliation or interference.
To others,
peace means the freedom to rob brothers without interruption.
To still others,
it means the leisure to devour the goods of the earth
without being compelled to interrupt their pleasures
to feed those whom their greed is starving.
And to practically everybody,
peace simply means the absence of any physical violence
that might cast a shadow over lives
devoted to the satisfaction of their animal appetites
for comfort and pleasure.”

CAMERON

And so,
I would like to drink
to Thomas Merton, the Communist.

CONRAD

To Thomas Merton, the Communist.

ALL

To Thomas Merton, the Communist.

ROBERT

Well....

I mean....

communist....

I mean....I guess....

briefly....

CAMERON

As George Bernard Shaw said:

I am a Christian.

And that obliges me to be a communist.

ALBERT

Yeah. Well.

Or, as H.L. Mencken said:

The only trouble with Communism is the Communists,
just as the only trouble with Christianity is the Christians.

CONRAD

Or, as Jenny Holzer said:

If you behaved nicely,
the communists wouldn't exist.

CAMERON

And then, too,

as Albert Einstein said:

The world is a dangerous place to live,
not because of the people who are evil,
but because of the people who don't do anything about it.

ROLAND

As Lenin said:

Communists have become bureaucrats.

If anything will destroy us, it is this.

ROBERT

As Ronald Reagan said:

How do you tell a Communist?

Well, it's someone who reads Marx and Lenin.

And how do you tell an anti-Communist?
It's someone who understands Marx and Lenin.

ALBERT

As Mae West said:
Between two evils, I always pick the one I never tried before.

ARNOLD

As Leslie Moak Murray said:
There are two kinds of people in the world:
communists,
and those who love chocolate.

CAMERON

To Thomas Merton, the Communist.

ROLAND

I think, in all our toasting
if we are going to be respectful of the truth
we should not forget to say
that Merton was, after all,
fundamentally fundamentally
a devout Catholic
who believed in God.
He would not want us to forget.
And so
I would like to offer a toast to Merton the Catholic

ALL

To Merton the Catholic

ROLAND

and a toast to God.

ALL

To God.

ROBERT

Well, and not just any Sunday Catholic
but to a seven day a week monk and a priest.

We are toasting someone who was
fundamentally
a monk and a priest.

ROLAND

A faithful Catholic
who believed in Catholicism.

BENNY

I think we have to say, too,
and not just because I'm a Buddhist:
Merton was also fundamentally a mystic!
A great mystic.
One of the great mystics of all times.
And I would offer a toast to Merton the mystic!

BOBBY

And a proponent of interfaith understanding!

CONRAD

And a Communist!

CAMERON

A Communist!

CONRAD

To Thomas Merton, the Communist.

ALBERT

And a hitchhiker!

ARNOLD

And a drinker!

ALBERT

Well,
a party lover
really.

So yes,
a drinker!

ARNOLD
And so,
of course,
a writer!

ALBERT
I think of him as the patron saint of writers!
Writing more than 50 books

ARNOLD
more than 70 books!
10,000 letters
and I don't know how many words

ALBERT
Well, yes,
and a poet!

ARNOLD
A man!!!!
I mean
that is to say
at the same time
both a lover
and the father of an illegitimate child.

ALBERT
Yes.
Right.

CONRAD
Sometimes I think you see
in the world
the kind of real, deep, committed, constant love
that you see when you spend time with
the cicadas in the south of France.

And you remember
there was a time long ago, in prehistoric times
when cicadas were human beings
back before the Muses were born.
And then when the Muses were born
and song came into being
some of these human creatures were so taken by the pleasure of it
that they sang and sang and sang.
And they forgot to eat or drink
they just sang and sang
and so,
before they knew it,
they died.
And from those human creatures a new species came into being
the cicadas
and they were given this special gift from the Muses:
that from the time they are born
they need no nourishment
they just sing continuously
caught forever in the pleasure of the moment
without eating or drinking
until they die.

This is the story of love.
If you stay there forever in that place
you die of it.

That's why people
can't stay in love.

But that's why we all want to be cicadas, really.
Someone who can give themselves to another
entirely
the sort of person who
if they were betrayed in love
would throw rocks
through the window of the person who betrayed them
because the rock thrower was the kind of person
who called up all their old lovers

when they got together with their new love
and said they were no longer available

[turning to Cameron]

but you
you
you insisted your family was your family
and your friends were your friends
and there was no reason to drop family and friends
because it had nothing to do with love affairs
and friendships don't have to end when you stop sleeping with someone
and when I told you I felt jealous
however irrational that was
you said you couldn't be controlled by my irrationality
and you would continue to see your friends
what if I didn't
that was my choice
so when I said then I would see my old lovers
you said, why would you do that, you said you didn't want to
I said I will do it if you do
you said that was infantile
I was doing it just to get back at you
whereas you were doing it because you wanted to do it
and I said then I want to do it, too, I always wanted to do it
and you said you never wanted to do it
I said I got the idea from you, I think it is a good idea
I will do it, too
and you said, if you do, I will leave you without thinking twice about it

you will leave me, I said
you will leave me?
yes, you said,
because you are an adolescent
and I only want a relationship with an adult, you said,
so I said, fine, fine, forget it
see whoever you want
forget it!!!!

[He turns abruptly away from Cameron
and faces in another direction.
Everyone else is awkwardly quiet for a moment,
not knowing quite what to do
until Bobby, looking at Conrad,
and then at Cameron,
and then at the crowd,
saves the moment by saying:]

BOBBY

To Thomas Merton, our hero!

SEVERAL CHORUS MEMBERS

To Thomas Merton!

A guy comes forward with a mike
and starts singing a song
and a couple guys join him for backup.

They sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing

sing.

Another guy listens to the singers for a minute
and then goes out
and comes back in with a big wooden box.

He turns,

takes hold of a bourbon bottle,

turns back,

and
happily
with a big, triumphant smile,
throws it into the wooden box,
and we hear the bottle shatter.
He turns
and finds more bottles and glasses
which he also throws into the box,
shattering them all.

No big deal.
It's happy, raucous party behavior.

Some of the chorus members might call out
"Yeah!"
"All right!"

Another guy watches him throw the first bottle into the box
and the second bottle
and a third bottle,

and then this second guy throws himself to the floor.
Happily.
Smiling.
He get up and throws himself to the floor again.
And again.

No big deal.
Just his own version of raucous party behavior.
And another guy joins in,
throwing himself to the floor, too.

Conrad,
watching the guys throw themselves to the floor,
joins in enthusiastically,
and throws himself to the floor, too.
Over and over again.

So the bottle throwing

and the three throwing themselves to the floor
and the singing of the song
are all happening at the same time.

Cameron watches Conrad throw himself to the floor.

In time,
the guy who brought in the box
stands on his head in the box
for a couple of minutes
and emerges a few moments later with a few cuts on his head
and blood all over his face.

Another guy drags the box out.

Conrad is now lying on the floor
exhausted,
not getting up.

Cameron
leans down and locks lips with Conrad
and raises him from the floor into a dance.

More music.

With lips permanently locked in a kiss
they keep dancing.

And, in the midst of all the dancing,
has one person sat down on the floor,
and gone into a deep meditation?

And someone else into a series of yoga maneuvers?

Conrad stops,
steps back gently
and tells Cameron—sweetly—
that he is dancing the wrong way,

he should put his hand here,
around Conrad's waist.

The other dancers all stop to watch Conrad and Cameron—
and to make sure they are doing the same thing.

Conrad and Cameron lock lips and dance again,
and all the other couples resume dancing, too.

Conrad stops in just a moment to correct Cameron again—sweetly—
how to hold Conrad's hand,
just where to put his left foot when he first moves,
—moves they both make
and that the other couples imitate.

And then Conrad and Cameron
are in a respectful conversation
about how to dance properly,
which naturally segues into observations
by everyone, about proper behavior.

ROBERT
Proper behavior is always proper.

ROLAND
And always correct.

ROBERT
And always correct.

BENNY
And as such
in its own way
though everyone always mocks propriety
and I myself do, too,
as a sort of upper class snobbishness
nonetheless, in its way
it is a kind
of considerateness.

ROBERT
Which is good.

BENNY
A kind of thoughtfulness.

ROBERT
Compassion.

BENNY
Empathy.

ROBERT
An understanding that
in human relationships
there is no innate privilege
that rests on one side or the other.
And so
you could say
propriety
is a form of truth.

CHORUS
And we like the truth.

CHORUS
Truth is good.

CHORUS
If ANYTHING can be said to be true
truth is good.

CHORUS
Right.

ALBERT
I'd like to offer a toast to our little truthful party here itself
and I think Thomas Merton would approve
because a party is a celebration

of the events and qualities of life
life itself
and of happiness itself
and I think that deserves a toast

ARNOLD

Certainly I would drink to happiness
I think Merton was a happy man
Oddly
When you think of all the time he spent alone
you would think he was gloomy or depressed
or just withdrawn
or sort of suspended in nowhere-land
but I think with all his engagements
with all his things
he was enormously active
and happy
and I would drink to happiness.

ALBERT

And just simply to fun.
There is nothing wrong with fun.
I like to have fun.
People like to have fun.
Fun is a good thing to have.
It should really be thought of as a virtue
because it does celebrate the gift of life itself.
It takes pleasure in being alive.

Human life.
A thing that some people think
was a gift of God.
I mean
I know
other people—
like myself—
think it evolved from little mucky
one-celled mollusks or something in the ocean
or little blobs in the mud

but even if that was the case
it's not something to be despised
it is rather something to be thought about
contemplated
and enjoyed
—and toasted!

ARNOLD

Being alive is good.
I drink to being alive.

BENNY

And even if you are not living in a nice
middle class home in the suburbs
or you're not an investment banker
or someone with all the comforts
of a well-financed life in a nice living room
but someone who has chosen
an unconventional life
a life not of an investment banker
but of a florist
or a pastry chef
or someone who runs a Mexican restaurant
this is not an evil or contrary thing to have done
it is simply another avenue of pleasure
potential joy
the relishing of being alive
which is a form of flattery of life itself
a form of flattery of Darwin or God
or whoever else is responsible for where we are
even acknowledging that we have difficulties
with war and with some people who really need help
and more help than we are giving them
still
the alternate life can be the good life, too,
the pastry chef
the balloon manufacturer
the Disneyland ticket taker
the guitar playing bohemian

ALBERT

I know a lot of people who would like to be bohemians
although they mostly would like to have
five or six million dollars in the hands of a really good
investment manager
so they could be a bohemian and live in the East Village
without worrying
and take walks every day in Tomkins Square Park
where Allen Ginsberg used to hang out
and Jack Kerouac probably

ARNOLD

and everyone still does if they do drugs
and they're homeless

ALBERT

and I love to take a walk there
and think
right
these are the winners
these are the living legacy
of the great beatniks
who showed us
that the way things are
is not the only way they have been
or the only way they can be

ARNOLD

life is full of impossible possibilities
and Tomkins Square Park is the memorial
to possibility

ALBERT

although it is true
that even sitting in the park
letting the time go by
like everyone else
you wish you would have five or six million
in the hands of a good investment manager

so you really know you don't have to worry
you can be at peace
with yourself and with the world
and set an example of how to be—
or just live in a monastery
where you have a roof over your head
and your meals are free

ARNOLD
and your clothes

ALBERT
and you don't have to worry about anything
and then you can hate capitalism
like all the other bohemians
and have contempt for jobs
and for all the conventions of daily life

ARNOLD
Certainly Merton was a bohemian
who lived a bohemian life
and more lives than that
many lives in one really
because also he was an adventurer

ALBERT
a wonderful adventurer in the biggest sense
an explorer
which is the sort of thing we admire
and praise
and name buildings after
and make statues for public parks
to remind the rest of us
to explore the universe ourselves
to be not afraid to leap into the unknown

BENNY

And also,
into a mental
or a spiritual place

BOBBY

A place where you find yourself alone

BENNY

In solitude

ROBERT

With God.

ROLAND

As Robert Schuller said:

Any fool can count the seeds in an apple.
Only God can count all the apples in one seed.

CHORUS

As the poet said, “Only God can make a tree” —
probably, as Woody Allen said,
because it’s so hard to figure out how to get the bark on.

CHORUS

As Saint Augustine said:

God is not what you imagine or what you think you understand.
If you understand you have failed.

CHORUS

As Isaac Bashevis Singer said:

Life is God’s novel. Let him write it.

CHORUS

As the Reverend Jerry Falwell said:

I feel most ministers who claim they’ve heard God’s voice
are eating too much pizza before they go to bed at night,
and it’s really an intestinal disorder, not a revelation.

CHORUS

As Mary Crowley said:

Every evening I turn my worries over to God.

He's going to be up all night anyway.

CHORUS

As Chuck Palahniuk said:

All God does is watch us and kill us when we get boring.

We must never, ever be boring.

BOBBY

When you think about God

sometimes I think:

okay,

heaven.

Well, I don't need to wait till I die

to go to heaven.

I have some heaven right here on earth,

spending time with friends

afternoons on the beach

or just having lunch on the terrace

overlooking all the hills and the beautiful grass

BENNY

or going to the south of France

BOBBY

or to Paris!

I mean, honestly,

I think this is better than the heaven people talk about.

And I think so who needs heaven.

Although

then

of course

I have some hell on earth, too.

BENNY

Really horrible times
not just joking about it
or covering it all up with these unemotional generalizations
like horrible.

BOBBY

And then of course
I might wish I would just be in heaven all the time.
Although I think the times of hell on earth
make me love so much more the times of heaven on earth.
I feel it so much more intensely.
And I think the heaven everyone talks about
in the afterlife
doesn't it get a little boring?
Just going on day after day in that bland sort of heaven
or even if it is ecstatic heaven all the time
wouldn't you need a break
and a little change of pace
just to really remember to enjoy it
to relish it deeply?
So I'm not really eager to go to heaven in the afterlife
and honestly
I think heaven in the afterlife was just made up
by people who don't quite know how to enjoy it on earth
or, probably more tragically,
who are not well to do enough
to have a lot of heaven in their daily lives.
And I'm truly sorry about that.
And I wish there would be a heaven in the afterlife
for all those people.
But unhappily I can't quite get myself
to believe in heaven in the afterlife.

CHORUS

As Woody Allen said:
God is silent.
Now if only man would shut up.
A guy turns front and takes a dance posture—

keeping his mouth firmly closed—
putting one shushing finger over his lips—
and so, because his other arm is free,
he flexes his bicep in his free arm.

Music.

The guy flexes his bicep to the music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

Music.

5 guys join him in bicep flexing dance

bicep flexing dance

bicep flexing dance

bicep flexing dance

bicep flexing dance

bicep flexing dance

bicep flexing dance

all in unison

and then they all do a hip thrust

hip thrust

hip thrust

hip thrust

hip thrust

hip thrust

hip thrust
hip thrust
very macho

then turn upstage and wiggle their butts
wiggle their butts
wiggle their butts
wiggle their butts
wiggle their butts
wiggle their butts
wiggle their butts
wiggle their butts
(not SO macho)

they move through other male display dance moves
finger snapping, etc.

then three others step up
three others
three others
three others
three others
three others
three others
three others

and do the same display moves.

Some guys enter with lawn sprinklers and set them off so the stage is drenched in water.

One or two of them dance among the lawn sprinklers.

The rhinoceros enters
while the dancing is going on,
and the rhinoceros looks around at the dancers and
then slowly crosses the stage.

While this is going on,
a guy appears in a wacky outfit,
carrying a gigantic birthday cake.
He puts the birthday cake down on a table.

Looks around to see if anyone is going to do anything
with the cake.

Sees that no one else is interested,
and leaves.

A few moments later
he returns
wearing a red shirt and white undies
with a dozen party hats
that he puts on the table.

And then
he turns and leaves.

He returns wearing a white shirt and tie and glasses
—as though he has been trying out acceptable party clothes.

This time he also has a bowl of ice cream.

And now 3 others come in,
wearing only underpants
with plates and bowls and forks and spoons
for the cake and ice cream.

3 naked men sit at dinner table
with one in evening clothes:
a snapshot of society.

[If a birthday party seems too obvious and simple-minded
for the occasion

then people can just bring in hors d'oeuvres and glasses of bourbon
and have a more elegant dinner party—
though they all still go through several changes of clothes
to get in the proper attire.]

The first man returns
this time only in white underpants.

The elegantly dressed man sings solo.

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

solo

A rack of clothes is brought on
and everyone dresses in dinner clothes.

It is as though they had stripped down to the essentials
or 'desocialized' themselves
and now they 'resocialize' themselves.

Everyone now sits or stands around the cake,
wearing their party hats,
and eating cake and ice cream.

ALBERT

I think of Merton.

I think: my family

my aunt was a nun

and my other aunt was the mother

of three priests and another nun

so, growing up,

I thought

that's enough Catholics in the family

I'm going swimming

I'm getting out of here

I'm going to get some fresh air

I'm going to be an atheist

but then I just lapsed into a life of thinking
and then writing things down
and now I think
I want a place like Thomas Merton had
and a life
reliable
forever
quiet
sitting in a room
alone
mulling
writing
permanent
everlasting
finally, it may be,
filled with sorrow
since I know
departure is inevitable
but, meanwhile,
it feels like it is lasting forever.
To have a writer's life
it is like having a monk's life
or it could be
to have a monk's life
that means you can have the perfect writer's life
that you can't have any other way
a place to write
to be alone
quiet

CHORUS

As Pascal said:

All men's miseries

derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone.

CHORUS

As Franz Kafka said: You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait, be quiet still and solitary. The world

will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

CHORUS

As Stevie Wonder said:

I can't say that I'm always writing in my head but I do spend a lot of time in my head writing or coming up with ideas. And what I do usually is write the music and melody and then, you know, maybe the basic idea. But when I feel that I don't have a song I just say, God, please give me another song. And I just am quiet and it happens.

CHORUS

As Lady Gaga said:

I was very depressed when I was 19... I would go back to my apartment every day and I would just sit there. It was quiet and it was lonely. It was still. It was just my piano and myself. I had a television and I would leave it on all the time just to feel like somebody was hanging out with me.

CHORUS

As Napoleon Bonaparte said:

The best cure for the body is a quiet mind.

CHORUS

As Christina Applegate said:

My dream is to have a house on the beach, even just a little shack somewhere so I can wake up, have coffee, look at dolphins, be quiet and breathe the air.

ROBERT

A quiet place
that's what I want

ROLAND

Everlasting on earth
that's what I want

BENNY

Me, too

ROBERT

Everlasting forever

BOBBY

Some solitude
some time and quiet to think
just to wallow in it all

ROLAND

For myself, I have only one desire
and that is the desire for solitude.
To disappear into God.
To be submerged in his peace.
To be lost in the secret of his space.

ALBERT

And, at the same time,
let's not forget
Thomas Merton's lover
and their illegitimate child
because, in the middle of all the solitude
and all the meditation
and the removal from the world
he acknowledged, too,
the attraction of life on earth
the things of daily life
the contradictory feelings we have
frankly, the personal and intimate love
we can feel for another person
and he didn't despise that
or judge it wrong
or take a strict negative moral view
but rather he understood
and he embraced it
as I hope to do.

CHORUS

As Oscar Wilde said:
Keep love in your heart. A life without it is like a sunless garden when the flowers
are dead.

CHORUS

As Mahatma Gandhi said:
Where there is love there is life.

CHORUS

As Lao Tzu said:
Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply
gives you courage.

CHORUS

As Mother Teresa said: I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there
can be no more hurt, only more love.

CHORUS

As Thomas Merton said:
Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone—we
find it with another.

[and now,

when they disagree from time to time

they aren't quite able to be as agreeable as they were

in the beginning of the party

because they have begun to irritate one another

with their different opinions of who Merton was,

and so they begin speaking with irritation

emphatic conviction

and even anger]

ROLAND

Still, nonetheless,
let's not forget

let's remember to toast
above all
again and again
Merton the Catholic
Merton the Catholic monk and priest!

BENNY

Well, you say he was a Catholic,
but no, really he was a Buddhist.

CHORUS

As Björk said:
I'm no Buddhist, but this is fu**ing enlightenment

CHORUS

As Cameron Diaz said:
You haven't partied until you've partied at dawn in complete silence with Buddhist monks.

CHORUS

As Regina Brett said:
Wouldn't it be great if health care plans
included a list of Buddhist monks among the network providers?

CHORUS

As Buddha said:
Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment.

CHORUS

As Wittgenstein said:
When we can't think for ourselves, we can always quote.

BENNY

He was a Buddhist.
Don't forget
at the end of his life

he went to Thailand
and most people think it was finally to become
a full-time Buddhist

ROLAND

I don't think so

BENNY

And he died by stepping on an electric wire
and he was electrocuted
and some people think his murder
was arranged by the Pope!

ROLAND

Murdered by the Pope!

By the Pope?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?

I don't think so.

All this talk of his being murdered by the Pope
and having an illegitimate child
these are all lies
by people trying to destroy his memory

ROBERT

and destroy the Catholic Church

ROLAND

and destroy the Catholic Church, yes

BOBBY

I don't think so.

I think this is an effort merely to speak the truth.

ROBERT

To lie is a sin.

Do you forget that to lie is a sin?

BOBBY

I am not lying!

ROLAND

That's a lie!

ROBERT

Merton was a Catholic!

He believed in Catholicism!

BENNY

Merton was a Buddhist.

In the end he was becoming a Buddhist!

ARNOLD

He was a bohemian!

If you want to know above all

Above all he was a bohemian.

CHORUS

As Brigitte Bardot said:

I'm a girl from a good family who was very well brought up. One day I turned my back on it all and became a bohemian.

CHORUS

As Marge Piercy said:

Long hair is considered bohemian, which may be why I grew it, but I keep it long because I love the way it feels, part cloak, part fan, part mane, part security blanket.

CHORUS

As Lenny Kravitz said:

My dream is to become a farmer. Just a Bohemian guy pulling up his own sweet potatoes for dinner.

CHORUS

He was, above all,

an adventurer,

an explorer

someone not afraid of stepping into the unknown

the great unknown

brave

fearless

strong
exciting
not simple minded
not simple
not reducible to this or that or the other
but willing to throw himself
defenseless
into the strange, the unfamiliar
the mysterious
the infinite

He was a Taoist, finally
at bottom, a Taoist

CHORUS
Taoism is: shit happens.

CHORUS
And Buddhism.
Buddhism is: If shit happens, it isn't really shit.

CHORUS
Zen Buddhism: Shit is, and is not.

CHORUS
Catholicism: If shit happens, you deserve it.

CHORUS
Protestantism: Let shit happen to someone else.

CHORUS
Presbyterian: This shit was bound to happen.

CHORUS
Episcopalian: It's not so bad if shit happens, as long as you serve the right wine
with it.

CHORUS

Darwinism: This shit was once food.

CHORUS

Capitalism: That's MY shit.

CHORUS

Communism: It's everybody's shit.

CHORUS

Feminism: Men are shit.

CHORUS

Chauvinism: We may be shit, but you can't live without us...

CHORUS

Commercialism: Let's package this shit.

CHORUS

Existentialism: Shit doesn't happen; shit IS.

CHORUS

Atheism: What shit? I can't believe this shit!

CHORUS

Nihilism: No shit.

CHORUS

Narcissism: I am the shit!

BENNY

That's not funny

you think that's funny

to make fun of people who believe certain things

but that's not funny

And Merton would not have thought that was funny.

ALBERT

I say it's not funny, it's serious!

BOBBY

And do you think I am funny because I am a Buddhist?

[and now

all patience is finally gone]

ALBERT

[shoving Bobby in the chest]

Who said I'm not a Buddhist?

BOBBY

Wait.

[shoving back]

I'm not joking.

ALBERT

I'm not joking.

BOBBY

I know an insult when I hear it.

ALBERT

[shoving again]

I'm not a person who insults people!

BOBBY

[twisting Albert's arm up behind his back]

No, you just start a fight.

ALBERT

I don't fight.

[they struggle]

It might be too messy for everyone to throw cake at each other,
but it could be that just one guy
smooshes his big piece of cake in another guy's face.

ROLAND

I fight!

I fight!

CAMERON

And so do I.

For the right thing!

[and the fourth guy shoves the third guy to the ground]

CHORUS MEMBER

What's that?

[grabbing Cameron and wrestling him toward the ground]

You think it's ok to do some violence?

[those five guys continue to struggle
and fight with one another,
and members of the chorus join in the fighting
and the shouting and yelling]

ALL THE OTHERS

Hey!

What!

What are you.....

Get the fuck.....

Goddammit!

etc

etc etc

[as we finally end up with everyone on stage in a huge, horrible, knock down riotous brawling fight.

And this fight maybe wants a fight choreographer to turn into a fifteen-minute brawl like we have never seen on stage before?

And sometimes two fighters will engage in such an amazing, stupendous feat of physical miraculousness that everyone else will stop and look at their solo or their duet, and then the group will resume again in the group brawl.

And slowly the fight comes to an end.

Everyone sits or lies on the floor, exhausted.
The man is still sitting at the table with his back to us,
listening,
his thoughts
are projected on the wall.

PAUSE]

What do you mean by contemplation anyway?

SILENCE

Does the silence scare you?

SILENCE

How do I live?

SILENCE

SILENCE

Who could tell where I would have ended?

SILENCE

SILENCE

Is nothing sacred?

SILENCE

SILENCE

Is everything sacred?

SILENCE

SILENCE

What is the question? Salvation, damnation?

SILENCE
SILENCE

Who can explain those things?

SILENCE
SILENCE

Or is it the question: What is serious?
What is to be taken seriously?
What is the
meaning of seriousness?
What is to be doubted?
What is to be dismissed as not serious?
Is there anything serious?
Is there anything not serious?

BRIEF PAUSE

Yes, but don't you think...?

BLACKOUT.

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