LAPHAM'S QUARTERLY

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MACHINES

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PREAMBLE

MACHINES

by David Heras

Quote 1

Quote 2

The view that machines cannot give rise to surprises is due, I believe, to a fallacy to which philosophers and mathematicians are particularly subject. This is the assumption that as soon as a fact is presented to a mind all consequences of that fact spring into the mind simultaneously with it. It is a very useful assumption under many circumstances, but one too easily forgets that it is false.

– Alan M. Turing

Give me a place to stand and a lever long enough, and I will move the world.

- Archemedies

Eug. Buland 88

1984: Pen

THE INVASION OF

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.

I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of men. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway above the flux. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to Earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate this evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.

This has been my life. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered me.

I have sought love, first, because it brings ecstasy - ecstasy so great that I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness - that terrible loneliness in which one shivering consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss. I have sought it finally, because in the union of love I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined.

This is what I sought, and though it might seem too good for human life, this is what?at last?I have found.

I had supposed until that time that it was quite common for parents to love their children, but the war persuaded me that it is a rare exception. I had supposed that most people liked money better than almost anything else, but I discovered that they liked destruction even better. I had supposed that intellectuals frequently loved truth, but I found here again that not ten per cent of them prefer truth to popularity. (?)

As a lover of truth, the national propaganda of all the belligerent nations sickened me. As a lover of civilization, the return to barbarism appalled me. (?)

He asked my religion and I replied "agnostic.? He asked how to spell it, and remarked with a sigh: ?Well, there are many religions, but I suppose they all worship the same God.? (?)

I have lived in the pursuit of a vision, both personal and social. Personal: to care for what is noble, for what is beautiful, for what is gentle; to allow moments of insight to give wisdom at more mundane times. Social: to see in imagination the society that is to be created, where individuals grow freely, and where hate and greed and envy die because there is nothing to nourish them. These things I believe, and the world, for all its horrors, has left me unshaken.

Bertrand Russell, British philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature (1872-1970), The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell (1967), Routledge, 2000, Prologue, p. 240, 241, 257, 466, Postscript. See also: ? Bertrand Russell?s message to future generations

FREE ME!!, KEVIN COOPER

Pg 414 of Witness to History

12 December 1901

The First Radio Signal Across The Atlantic

Guglielmo Marconi

Shortly before mid-day I placed the single earphone to my ear and started listening. The receiver on the table before me was very crude - a few coils and condensers and a coherer - no valves, no amplifiers, not even a crystal. But I was at last on the point of putting the correctness of all my beliefs to test. The answer came at 12:30 when I heard, faintly but distinctly, *pip-pip-pip*. I handed the phone to Kemp: ‘Can you hear anything?’ I asked. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘the letter S’ - he could hear it. I knew then that all my anticipations had been justified. The electric waves sent out into space from Poldhu had traversed the Atlantic - the distance, enormous as it seemed then, of 1,700 miles - unimpeded by the curvature of the earth. The result meant much more to me than the mere successful realization of an experiement. As Sir Oliver Lodge has stated, it was an epoch in history. I now felt for the first time absolutely certain that the day would come hwne mankind would be able to send messages without wires not only across the Atlantic but between the fathermost ends of the earth.

Marconi awaited the signal from Poldhu, Cornwall, in a hut on the cliffs at St John’s Newfoundland

2018: Portland, Oregon

BEING HUMAN?

I am the voice you never hear

If I spoke would you listen?

I am the ugly duckling

Visible in your pretty little world

I am the criminal when I try to sleep

I am the nuisance

Trying to keep dry out of the rain

I am the homeless person

Looking for dignity and a safe secure place.

Leo Rhodes

Columnist, Street Roots

1993: _____

ON LIVING

I

Living is no laughing matter:
you must live with great seriousness
like a squirrel, for example--
I mean without looking for something
beyond and above living,
I mean living must be your whole
occupation.
Living is no laughing matter:
you must take it seriously,
so much so and to such a degree
that, for example, your hands tied behind
your back,
your back to the wall,
or else in a laboratory
in your white coat and safety glasses,
you can die for people--
even for people whose faces you've
never seen,
even though you know living
is the most real, the most beautiful thing.
I mean, you must take living so seriously
that even at seventy, for example, you'll
plant olive trees--
and not for your children, either,
but because although you fear death you
don't believe it,
because living, I mean, weighs heavier.

II

Let's say you're seriously ill, need
surgery--
which is to say we might not get
from the white table.
Even though it's impossible not to feel
sad
about going a little too soon,
we'll still laugh at the jokes being told,
we'll look out the window to see it's
raining,
or still wait anxiously
for the latest newscast ...
Let's say we're at the front--
for something worth fighting for, say.
There, in the first offensive, on that very
day,
we might fall on our face, dead.
We'll know this with a curious anger,
but we'll still worry ourselves to death
about the outcome of the war, which
could last years.
Let's say we're in prison
and close to fifty,
and we have eighteen more years, say,
before the iron doors will open.
We'll still live with the outside,
with its people and animals, struggle and
wind--
I mean with the outside beyond the
walls.
I mean, however and wherever we are,
we must live as if we will never die.

III

This earth will grow cold,
a star among stars
and one of the smallest,
a gilded mote on blue velvet--
I mean this, our great earth.
This earth will grow cold one day,
not like a block of ice
or a dead cloud even
but like an empty walnut it will roll
along
in pitch-black space ...
You must grieve for this right now
--you have to feel this sorrow now--
for the world must be loved this much
if you're going to say "I lived" ...

Trans. by Randy Blasing and Mutlu
Konuk (1993) Nazim Hikmet

1973: Union Seminary

A SECULAR SPIRITUAL

Because we know that we have survived, that we have not been destroyed, and that we are more than the stripes on our backs, we can sing as a way of celebrating our being. Indeed, for black people, existence is a form of celebration. It is joy, love, and sex. It is hugging, kissing, and feeling. People cannot love physically and spiritually (the two cannot be separated!) until they have been up against the edge of life, experiencing the hurt and pain of existence. They cannot appreciate the feel and touch of life nor express the beauty of giving themselves to each other in community, in love, and in sex until they know and experience the brokenness of existence as disclosed in human oppression. People who have not been oppressed physically cannot know the power inherent in bodily expressions of love. That is why white Western culture makes a sharp distinction between the spirit and the body, the divine and the human, the sacred and the secular. White oppressors do not know how to come to terms with the essential spiritual function of the human body. But for black people, the body is sacred, and they know how to use it in the expression of love.

Most interpreters agree that the dominant and most expressive theme in the blues is sex. Whatever else is said about them, the blues cannot be understood if this important theme is omitted. As blues man Furry Lewis puts it: "*The Blues come from a woman wanting to see her man, and a man wanting to see his woman*." Or, as Henry Townsend says: "*You know, that's the major thing in life. Please believe me. What you love the best is what can hurt you the most*." Ma Rainey also puts it well:

People have different blues and think they're mighty sad,
But blues about a man the worst I ever had..

And another says:

You know my woman left me,
Left me cold in hand.
I would't hate it so bad,
But she left with another man.

The blues are the songs of men and women who have been hurt and disappointed and who feel the confusion and isolation of human love.

'Gwine lay my head right on de railroad track,
'Gwine lay my head right on de railroad track,
Cause my baby, she won't take me back

The blue mood is about black men and women-- their lament, grief, and disillusionment. In a world where a people possess little that is their own, human relationships are placed at a high premium. The love between men and women becomes immediate and real. Black people live in that kind of world; and they express the pain of separation and loneliness.

Did you ever wake up in the morning, find your man had gone?
Did you ever wake up in the morning, find your man had gone?
You will wring your hands, you will cry the whole day long.

But the blues were not just sad feelings about separation, the loss of a man or woman. There was also humor about sexuality.

Good lookin' woman make a bull dog break his chain,
Good lookin' woman make a bull dog break his chain,
Good lookin' woman make a snail catch a passenger train.

Yaller gal make a preacher lay his Bible down,

Waterhouse Hylas and the Nymphs -Manchester ArtG allery 1896

Yaller gal make a preacher lay his Bible down,
Good lookin' high brown make him run from town to town.

Good lookin' woman make a mule kick his stable down,
Good lookin' woman make a mule kick his stable down,
Good lookin' woman make a rabbit move his family to town.

Woman without a man like a ship without a sail,
Woman without a man like a ship without a sail,
Ship without a sail like a dog without a tail.

There is seriousness, too, when a man appeals to his woman to make up her mind.

If you didn't want me girlie what made you say you do,
If you didn't want me girlie what made you say you do,
Take your time little girl, nobody's rushin' you.

The blues are honest music. They describe every aspect of a woman's feelings about a man, and what a man thinks about a woman. Through the blues, black people express their views about infidelity and sex. The blues woman said:

You can cheat on me, you can steal on me, you can fool me all along.
You can cheat on me, you can steal on me, you can fool me all along.
All I ask you daddy, please don't let me catch you wrong.

And her man answered:

I'm a hard-working man and, baby, I don't mind dying,

Life is art. Art is life. I never separate it. I don't feel much anger. I equally have a lot of joy. -Ai Weiwei

I'm a hard-working man and, baby, I don't mind dying,
I catch you cheating on me, then, baby, you don't mind dying.

It has been the vivid description of sex that caused many church people to reject the blues as vulgar or dirty. The Christian tradition has always been ambiguous about sexual intercourse, holding it to be divinely ordained yet the paradigm of rebellious passion. Perhaps this accounts for the absence of sex in the black spirituals and other black church music. But most blacks only verbalized the distinction between the "Scared" and "profane" and found themselves unable to follow white Christianity's rejection of the body. And those who did not experience the free acceptance of sexual love on Saturday nights, expressed it indirectly on Sunday mornings through song and sermon.

In the blues there is an open acceptance of sexual love, and it is described in most vivid terms: "She moves it just right," "I'm going to have it now," "It hurts me so good," "Do it a long time," "Warm it up to me," "Drive it down," "Slow driving."

Peach Orchard Mama, you swore nobod'd pick your fruit but me,
Peach Orchard Mama, you swore nobod'd pick your fruit but me,
I found three kid men shaking down your peaches free.

What are we to make of such blatant descriptions of sexual love? Theologically, the blues reject the Greek distinction between the soul and the body, the physical and the spiritual. They tell us that there is no wholeness without sex, no authentic love without the feel and touch of the physical body. The blues affirm the authenticity of sex as the bodily expression of black soul.

The blues are not profane in any negative sense and neither are they immoral. They deal with the truth of human existence and the kinds of difficulties black people experience trying to hold themselves together. They tell us about their strengths and weaknesses, their joys and sorrows, their love and hate. And because they expressed their most intimate and precious feelings openly, they were able to survive as a community amid very difficult circumstances. They sang together, prayed together, and slept together. It was sometimes sweet and sometimes bitter; but they could make it because they tried; they "kept on pushing," looking for that new black humanity.

White people obviously cannot understand the love that black people have for each other. People who enslave humanity cannot understand that meaning of human freedom; freedom comes only to those who strive for it in the context of the community of the enslaved. People who destroy physical bodies with guns, whips, and napalm cannot know the power of physical love. Only those who have been hurt can appreciate the warmth of love that proceeds when persons touch, feel, and embrace each other. The blues are openness to feeling and the emotions of physical love.

From Dr. Reverend James H. Cone's seminal "The Spirituals and the Blues"

The Blues and the Spirituals
Chapter 6 The Blues: A Secular Spiritual
Subsection The Blues and Sex pg 128 - 132

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DEFINITIONS AND WORDS PAGE

Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares, a sculpture by Evgeniy Vuchetich, 1959.

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Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares, a sculpture by Evgeniy Vuchetich, 1959.

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