

FUTURE

by

Willard Thurston

It is not always reassuring to remember that a mass idol is often close to the mass, that to appeal to many people you cannot expect them to reach much beyond their navel. This fact poses a dilemma for earnest politicians but for lusty partisans like Lady Gaga or David Bowie RIP, it's proof once again that slugs can do the most versatile things like parallel park (luxuriate in the byways of sex) entirely on their own.

But let's not dwell on the jejune, the self-evident.

The unsung and quite tolerable irony is that folks like Lady G. may not really understand the romantic essence which thrives in a culture of decorum, restraint and commitment — where, to quote a former friend of Leonard Cohen, carrying groceries for Leonard produced a rapture as poignant as anything Leonard did on his knees. As touchy old Dick Wagner never got tired of rhapsodizing — you sleep well after a historic snog, better still if it's a once in lifetime snog. But then Wagner could call his big obsession the Ring Cycle and not provoke the Social Justice Warriors, who've decided that rings are for ill-tempered bull males not free-ranging gazelles. Please be warned. Eros and civilization don't get on, because civilization usually makes allowances for squares. For instance, in Mr. Cohen's song The Future, St. Paul is an accessory with the Berlin Wall, Hiroshima, anal sex, crack, Mao and Stalin. The anal sex is presumably non-consenting. Though, as he purrs in a later number with the facility of a Thersites (Shakespeare's flagrant pander in *Troilus and Cressida*): 'If it's a thrill you're looking for / Well, honey, I'm flexible. Oh, yeahhh.' Even while he's waiting for the Miracle he can be debonair: 'Let's do something crazy, something absolutely wrong.'" He

and a future DAESH* recruit may have attended the same barbecue, shared the same fire starter — in untrammelled experience we grow, he's intimated more than once, so let's go coal walking — endure the trials of sex and drugs and honky-tonks, and slow dancing in the afterglow. Remember, we're not talking here about the Zen maintenance of looking after an Alzheimer parent, tightening up thirteen pair of Mite League skates under a winter sky, stocking Food Bank shelves, or even getting the tanglefoot on in time. Let alone keeping the home fires burning and fending off subsidies. Mr. Cohen is only occasionally stern on himself: 'I pray that a loving memory exists for them too / The precious ones I overthrew/ For an education in the world.' It is a difficult request: May God or Whoever make me gracious and thoughtful for leaving home — for an education in the world, with rhythm guitar, select wine and pharmacopoeia, and assorted Salomés to cool the odd canicule. The oracular fire of the licensed soul. The word as brand. Partly revealed to us in his sensational The Future, which one aficionado described, for his slower readers, as 'murderously apocalyptic'. Or, in Mr. Cohen's consular warning: 'If I'd just nailed the lyrics of The Future to a church door in Wittenberg, it would be a heavy, foreboding and sinister document, but it's married to a hot little dance track.' The modern invention. Sometimes called 'making strange' — humming at the up tempo pillage and rape while votaries rally the aggregate.

In Anthem, Mr. Cohen, even more adventurous, urges us to cherish defects — the cracks, the flaws, that let the light shine in we're instructed. An injunction he repeats several times. AIDS, then, as a skeletal, light-giving arabesque. Things like the splendid light-giving clerestories of say Chartres Cathedral don't count, apparently. Only the flaws disclose the effective light. Of course, the gamy intervening variable in all this passion 'play' is that Leonard Cohen is really a hell of

a lot of fun. Gonads that could baste the world. With an unction the late Catherine Mackinnon must have envied. I keep seeing people hip hopping in endless entertainment or welfare lineups, ashamed to lose a beat. Easier to follow than a Schubert concert suite, the sinister ballade with libidinal feet. The future.

But then along comes Closing Time, Democracy and Dancing to the End of Love, and you're back ogling polka dots, musing over America's putative 'spiritual thirst', and wondering if maybe dancing in and of itself is all that sustainable.

About as close to a Miracle as the reedy prophet allows.

*An acronym for the Arabic phrase al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). Less bruising for some apologists than ISIS or ISIL.