

with slow-motion instant replay. I was surprised not to find the spectacle more disturbing. In fact it was riveting. It has been remarked that a bullfight is not a sport but a tragedy. (All right, so I've been reading *Death in the Afternoon*. It makes a lot more sense now.) Anyway, the next Sunday evening found my daughter and me at the *plaza de toros*, me bareheaded lest a Durham baseball cap that said "Bulls" be thought in poor taste. In a little over two hours we saw six bulls dispatched with varying degrees of artistry. So far as I know, no one has ever proposed to do vasectomies instead, but that could be a heck of a show, too.

As I say, we knew we were in Spain. But we were also constantly reminded that we were in Catalonia, and the distinction Catalans often make between the Spanish "state" and the Catalan "nation" is easily and sympathetically grasped by someone from a place where caps and bumper stickers say "American by birth / Southern by the grace of God."

Want a quick tour of Barcelona? Walk away from the harbor that once served Romans and Phoenicians. You come first to the medieval "Gothic Quarter" around the cathedral, then to spacious neighborhoods of boulevards and cafes that feel like Paris without the tourists, finally to execrable high-rise worker-warrens that should merely be passed through as quickly as possible—which is usually not quickly at all, given the gruesome traffic. Moses Hadas remarked once that "a subject people's only glories are departed ones" and Catalonia's cultural high-water marks came in the 12th century and in the first third of this one, which makes for some fine Romanesque and *art nouveau* architecture.

The most famous building, of course, almost the city's signature, is Gaudi's unfinished sand-castle church of Sagrada Familia. Its original plan calls for a sculptured devil in the form of a serpent, handing a bomb to an anarchist worker. Gaudi was an early victim of the Barcelona traffic, run down by a tram before he lived to see the Civil War, but he knew an enemy when he saw one. In the cloister of the old cathedral is a chapel dedicated to 930 priests, monks, and nuns of the diocese murdered in that war, many by anarchists. (If those killed by the Na-

tionalists have a memorial now I didn't see it.)

After the war, Catalan autonomist sentiment was vigorously suppressed by the Franco regime. In particular, the Catalan language was expunged from the schools and public life. Since Franco's death, however, restrictions on Catalan have gone the way of bikini tops on the Costa Brava. Now Castilian Spanish has little more standing in Catalonia than English does in Quebec. A tourist can get along pretty well with Castilian only because most waiters and hotel staff seem to be Spanish-speaking migrants from the impoverished South; as one moves up the economic ladder Barcelonans tend more and more to be bilingual, and some refuse to speak Castilian on principle. Newcomers are encouraged to learn Catalan, and to all appearances are fully accepted once they've done so. Road signs are provided in both Catalan and Castilian, but the Castilian has often been effaced by language vigilantes with spray paint. Meanwhile the Catalan flag of four red stripes on a yellow field, representing the bloody fingerprints of a national hero, is everywhere.

Elsewhere (across the French border in "Occitania," for instance) the typical separatist is usually a member of the petit-intelligentsia who dreams of being minister of culture or ambassador to the Court of St. James's instead of senior lecturer in sociology at a provincial university. But Catalan nationalism's appeal is both broader and deeper. The major nationalist party is headed by a banker. That may help to explain why Catalans, who can be unreliable Spaniards, seem to be good Europeans. As it's usually presented, "Europe" strikes me as an idea that only a chamber of commerce could love, but Barcelona has always been a bourgeois city of merchants and manufacturers, many of whom would prefer to think of their town as a major European metropolis rather than the second city of Spain.

In other quarters, I suspect, the appeal of "Europe" is that it may eventually make Spain obsolete. There's an image lurking about of the New Europe as a loose confederation of communities: Catalans, Flemings, Bretons, Alsations, Basques, Occitans, Welsh—in time maybe Croats, Vlachs,

Lapps, Ukrainians, who knows? This vision of all the old, suppressed, organic nations rising up, shaking free of the artificial strictures of states, becoming fully themselves—this pluralistic vision conflicts with the ambitions of the Eurocrats in Strasbourg, but it's a lovely, romantic idea, and I wish it well. It reminds me of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, when the king gives each district of London its independence. Pointing to "old inviolate Notting Hill," he says: "Look up nightly to that peak, my child, where it lifts itself among the stars so ancient, so lonely, so unutterably Notting."

John Shelton Reed writes from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he is a professor of sociology at a provincial university.

Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

Make a Joyful Noise.
Awomen.



Two years ago, because it felt inevitable and right, I took the happy leap of faith that I had been approaching for years and became a Catholic. The reasons why are perhaps fodder for another letter at another time. Let me just say here and now that current church music and liturgy were *not* among the compelling forces.

Not that mackerel-snappers are worse in those respects than any other denomination—but that's my point. They sound just *like* any other denomination, and all of them are pretty lame these days when it comes to the glorious possibilities of the sung English language as a path to the salvation of the soul. I expected more from the church that spawned Palestrina, the church in which Christ's presence in the Eucharist is not considered merely symbolic. (As Flannery O'Connor said, if it's just a *symbol*, then to Hell with it.) I expected more from the church that gave rise, literally, to the great cathedrals and can trace its popes directly back to the day when Christ commissioned Peter. In short, I expect-

ed less silliness.

Most egregious among the Catholic Church's linguistic sins are those it shares with other mainline churches: the "corrections" to avoid "sexism." "Sexism" is defined, by those who make such decisions, in two contradictory ways: as any action or language hinting that there is a *difference* between men and women, that we might possibly have complementary responsibilities in the church and in life; and, alternately, any language in which the male gender is presumed to *include* the female. It's a bore, these days, to bash wimmin's lib—like communism, it's a bankrupt ideology and everybody knows it—but somehow these people are still allowed to interfere with *real* church business. My husband and I each teach a Tuesday-night third-grade CCD class, and at the "commissioning" of the teachers, we did all the right things, including "journaling," which wasn't journaling at all—that would have been bad enough—but merely writing on paper intimate things about ourselves to "share" with the persons sitting near us while some wacky space-music played too loudly. When it came time for the prayer and responses, the CCD coordinator—a lovely woman whose salary the church pays—carefully changed every "His" to "God's." The Devil made me ask her *why* she'd done that. We got a five-minute explanation about the genderlessness of God and the creative power of the womb, and how we should teach our classes that God is both male and female. Then we said the "Our Father."

Some modern musical emendations are puzzling but harmless, such as changing "Brothers all are we" to "We are family," and "Let me walk with my brother" to "Let us walk with each other" in "Let There Be Peace on Earth" (1955). I'd even be charitable enough to call these two changes improvements—if I didn't hate the tune so much. It screams for an accor-dion.

On the other hand, consider "How Great Thou Art." Frankly, I don't like many hymns that aren't at least one hundred years old (the German and English ones are the best, although some of the old Negro spirituals are exquisite), and this one has always seemed like *exactly* the kind of selec-

tion that should be featured—as it so often is—on a "Greatest Gospel Hits" album ("Order Before Midnight Tonight and Receive FREE This Lovely Cubic Zirconia 'Last Supper' Dashboard Ornament"). Still, the song rhymes and scans, I can whistle it in the shower, and it's got twenty years on most of the other songs we sing. Why, though, did the Oregon Catholic Press, which publishes the yearly music issue accompanying the seasonal missal that my church uses, feel compelled to change "all the works thy hands have made" to "all the *worlds* thy hands have made," and "mighty thunder" to "rolling thunder"? My husband and I decided that the words "works" and "mighty" were deleted because they offended the sensibilities of some small, lazy minority—children? More probably, though, the two words were simply felt to be too . . . manly.

Rhyming and scanning (to say nothing of making sense) are precious commodities in the liturgical music of today. My husband's all-time least favorite song has to be this "Hosea":

Come back to me / with all
your heart.
Don't let fear / keep us apart.
Trees do bend, / though straight
and tall;
So must we / to others call.

The wilderness / will lead you
To your heart / where I
will speak.
Integrity / and justice
With tenderness / you shall
know.

You shall sleep / secure with
peace;
Faithfulness / will be your joy.

Long have I waited for your
coming home to me
And living deeply our new life."

Riveting, isn't it?—whatever it might mean. Couple these words with a pachydermal 4/4 dirge-tune and you've got instant narcosis. I give it a 70, Dick; it's hard to dance to.

The song that makes *me* shudder is:

One bread, one body, one Lord
of all,
One cup of blessing which
we bless[?].

And we, though many,
throughout the earth,
We are one body in this
one Lord.

Gentile or Jew, servant or free,
woman or man, no more.

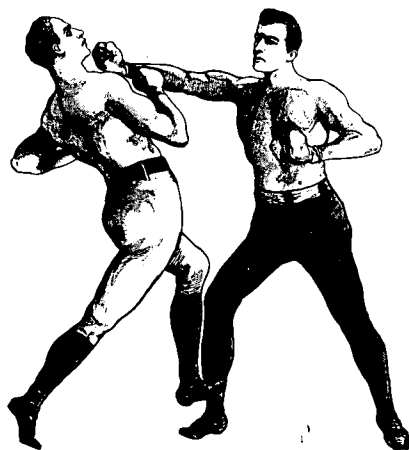
Give me "Old Hundredth" any day. Actually the words here are more or less scriptural; it's the *tune* that sounds like the lowing of many cattle. But I believe I like even *this* song better than the numerous "shalom" songs (with mandatory, embarrassing, choreographed actions) giving off the faint, cloyed odor of false ecumenism. Catholic nuns who like to dress like all the rest of us, and women who attend "women bonding seminars" are especially enthusiastic about the "shalom" songs.

As for the introductory rites and liturgies of the Word and the Eucharist, I haven't much except the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer with which to compare their language, and even the Episcopalians have sacrificed that gorgeous tool of reverence to modern fads. The language in the Catholic "missalette" (what further proof that the Mass has been demeaned?) does what its designers intended—makes the Mass accessible to even the least educated or discerning among us—and who would be foolish enough to say that that is lamentable? But what I try to do, when I remember to, is rise *above* my baseness, and, aside from the lessons and the Gospel reading and sometimes the homily, there is little in the rest of the service that helps me do that. I want a wonderful string of words, heavy with meaning, to muse upon, a turn of phrase that embodies all poetry and all truth. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint": something like that. I need reassurance that, bad as I am, I am not bad alone, and can be healed. Think of the sad handful of really good American novelists of the past decade, and then think of all the self-christened writers messing with our souls' food. It's a sin.

And while we're on the subject: since when are word-lovers the one minority that can be abused with impunity?

Jane Greer edits Plains Poetry Journal in Bismarck, North Dakota.

WORDS IN COLLISION



The Puritan and the Profligate

John Lofton Interviews Allen Ginsberg

Lofton: In the first section of your poem "Howl" you wrote: "I saw the best young minds of my generation destroyed by madness." Did this also apply to you?

Ginsberg: That's not an accurate quotation. I said the "best minds," not "the best young minds." This is what is called hyperbole, an exaggerated statement, sort of a romantic statement. And I suppose it could apply to me, too, or anybody. It cuts both ways. People who survived and became prosperous in a basically aggressive, warlike society are in, a sense, destroyed by madness. Those who freaked out and couldn't make it, or were traumatized, or artists who starved, or what not, they couldn't make it, either. It kinda cuts both ways. There's an element of humor there.

Lofton: When you say you suppose this could have applied to you, does this mean you don't know if you are mad?

Ginsberg: Well, who does? I mean everybody is a little mad.

Lofton: But I'm asking you.

Ginsberg: Everybody is a little bit mad. You are perhaps taking this a little too literally. There are several kinds of madness; divine madness. And in the Western tradition there is what Plato called —

Lofton: But I'm talking about this in the sense you spoke of in your 1949 poem "Bop Lyrics," when you wrote: "I'm so lucky to be nutty."

Ginsberg: You're misinterpreting the way I'm using the words.

Lofton: No, I'm asking you a question. I'm not interpreting anything.

Ginsberg: I'm afraid that your linguistic presupposition is, as you define it, that "nutty" means insanity rather than inspiration. You are interpreting, though you say you aren't, by choosing one or another definition and excluding another. So I think you'll have to admit you are interpreting.

Lofton: Actually, I don't admit that.

Ginsberg: You don't want to admit something. Come on. Come off it. Don't be a prig.

Lofton: No, I just want to ask you a question.

Ginsberg: No, you're not just asking me a question. You're *first* interpreting the language and wanting me to use the idea the way you use it. [But] it's my words. And I'm trying to explain to you what it meant.

Lofton: On the contrary, I was asking you what you meant by what you wrote.

Ginsberg: Oh, I see. It's a double use of the word "madness" or "crazy" or "nutty." But if you'll listen to this tape you'll find you asked to exclude one aspect and wanted "nutty" to mean "crazy" or "insane." And that's why I say you are interpreting and not wishing to use the language as I had originally set it out. And you weren't interested in my explanation. Are we communicating or just sparring?

Lofton: I think you can do both. It's

not either/or.

Ginsberg: All right. All right. But you have to remember what we're saying. You can't amnesize what we were saying. I feel you're trying to avoid recognition of the fact that you were trying to exclude *both* meanings of the word "crazy."

Lofton: No, I'm just trying to understand what you meant by what you wrote. But this question of madness —

Ginsberg: There's also another background. In Zen Buddhism there is wild wisdom, or crazy wisdom, crazy in the sense of wild, unlimited, unbounded. Or as in jazz, when someone plays a beautiful riff or extemporizes, they say crazy man.

Lofton: But I am interested in this question of your possible madness. It's not a gratuitous question. There is a history of madness in your family.

Ginsberg: Very much so.

Lofton: Your mom died in 1956 in a mental institution. So my question is not cute or facetious. And the *Current Biography Yearbook* for 1987 says that when a roommate of yours, in 1949, stole to support his drug habit, and was arrested, you were implicated circumstantially and pleaded a psychological disability and spent eight months in the Columbia Psychiatric Institute. What was this psychiatric disability and why did you spend just eight months in this institute?

Ginsberg: Well, I had sort of a visionary experience in which I heard William Blake's voice. It was probably an auditory hallucination but was a very rich experience.

Lofton: This happened while you were masturbating, right?

Ginsberg: Yes, but *after*.

Lofton: Not during, but after?

Ginsberg: After. Did you read this in the *Paris Review*?

Lofton: No, in the *Current Biography Yearbook* for 1987. But I want to ask you about your roommate, this drug arrest and this psychiatric disability you pleaded.

Ginsberg: No, no, no, no, no, no, no