

Thomas Meyer: a Tragic Comedy of Sorts

by Benjamin Shepard, 1997

Introduction:

The Problem of Narrative vs. Historic Truth in the Life of Thomas Meyer*

During a 1961 interview at Chicago's Blackstone Hotel, a telling interaction unfolded between Studs Terkel, America's premiere oral historian, and Tennessee Williams, one of the nation's great playwrights. Williams was discussing the often incomplete nature of the characters he chose to write about within his fictions. Terkel notes:

"Think of Blanche for a minute. I'm asking you, the creator, to think of Blanche. I'm thinking of her for moment. She represented so many good things too, despite the sham that she seemed to evoke."

"Well, as she said. I don't tell truth. I tell what ought to be truth. She had the courage to admit that she occasionally embellished upon the real facts. And when her back was to the wall, she had courage, truth, and eloquence, I thought," Williams went on to respond.

There is an eloquence, a truth, to Blanche's embellished vision of what "ought to be truth." Terkel, in noting how many good things *A Street Car Named Desire's* Blanche DuBois represented, illuminated a fundamental point of his craft, his appreciation for the incompleteness of the individual representation of the self within a story, a play, or an interview. A beauty unfolds when allowing people to tell their stories, when watching these stories unfold. Something terribly important happens as a person gives and takes

details about the representations they consider their reality. Freeman and Combs (1996) describe this process as "the social construction of preferred realities." Identity is a life story with all the inconsistencies of a Blanche DuBois monologue.

In the prologue to his memoirs, Carl Jung (1961:3) would note, "My life is a story of the self realization of the unconscious." Identity is viewed as a story, something to be expressed. "Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desired to evolve out of its unconscious conditions and to experience itself as a whole. I cannot employ the language of science to trace this process of growth in myself, for I cannot express myself as a scientific problem." Reality and identities are not considered fixed or as matters of empirical truths.

Jung would go on to elaborate about the parameters in which he was convertible to consider his life story. "What we are to our inward vision, and what man appears to be sub specie aeternitatis, can only be expressed by way of myth. Myth is more individual and expresses life more precisely than does science. Science works with concepts of averages which are far too general to do justice to the subjective variety of an individual life."

This being said, Jung would go on to emphasize both the narrative and mythic nature of the life story he was about to tell. "Thus it is that I have now undertaken, in my eighty-third year, to tell my personal myth. I can only make direct statements, only "tell stories." Whether or not the stories are "true" is not the problem. The only question is whether what I tell is my fable, *my* truth." The truth Jung discusses is of a heterogeneous nature. There is objective truth which Jung suggests, "is not the problem" and there is "*my* truth," which is of a highly subjective, mythic nature. In essence, he has identified an issue of central importance within the study of people's lives: the dichotomy between narrative and historic truth.

Cohler (1983, p.210) uses the term, "personal myth" to underscore the subjective legitimacy of the life story. The expression personal myth refers to the non rational explanatory truths bringing poetry out of the chaos of the life story. Mercia Eliade (1963,

p1) suggests 20th century scholars view myths both as "fictions" or "illusions," and as "sacred tradition," or "primordial revelation." Twentieth century scholars accept myths as they were understood in the archaic societies, in which "myth" is understood as a "true story.... a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary." Despite occasional inaccuracy, there is a core integrity and truth to a personal story.

Essentially, the personal myth contains a closeness, a depth of insight into and respect for the point of view of the subject of a study which lays at the core of an ethnographic method which makes the goal of "thick description" of the subject and scene (Gaiters, 1974) an article of faith. Howard Becker (1996:57) notes: "One major point most ethnographers tout as a major epistemological advantage of what they do is that it lets them grasp the point of view of the actor." So, as the following story unfolds, a central goal will be to present as accurate as possible a notion of the point of view of the central actors within this story: Thomas Meyer and my father. A dialectic tension will continually exist in which narrative truth, or what should be, will battle with the alarm clocks of historic truth and its prerequisites.

A story which must contend with the ambiguities of maintaining a balance between heterogeneous truths (historic vs. narrative) must utilize a theoretical container for such a twofold reality. Such a proposition presents a challenge to the very nature of individual lives within space and time. For the purposes of the following story we will look to another notion of heterogeneous truth articulated by Chicago scholars Victor Turner, Mercea Eliade, and Robert Moore, that of heterogeneous time: mythical vs. historic. The point is essential to the following story for it allows a time and space container for the personal myth of Thomas Meyer to co-exist with the historic realities of his life in the 20th century.

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade (1957:17) differentiates between the dynamics of religious and, "profane experience of the world." Religious man/woman dwells, "*in a sacralized cosmos*," as opposed to modern man. "We need only to compare

their existential situations with that of a man living in modern societies, *living in a desacralized cosmos*, and we shall immediately be aware of all that separates him from them." Eliade (1954:141) begins the final chapter of the *Myth of the Eternal Return* by drawing a dichotomy between modern and religious man/woman in terms of their view of history. "In short, it would be necessary to confront "historical man" (modern man), who consciously and voluntarily creates history, with the men of traditional civilizations, who, as we have seen, had a negative attitude toward history." Eliade (1957:17) explains "For him [religious man/woman] it is sacred time that makes possible the other time, ordinary time, the profane duration in which every human life takes its course. It is the eternal present of the mythical event that makes possible the profane duration of historical events."

Thomas Meyer was much more comfortable within a dialog with literatures, myths, and rituals of the eternal than with the constraints of historic/ modern time and its prerequisites (such as deadlines, boundaries and other necessities. Chapter two will explore the Thomas Meyer's problem with details and how he just about flunked out of Harvard due to his ineptitude during mechanical drawing class). As far as Thomas was concerned, I would suggest that it was his intuitive appreciation of mythic time and its ceremonies which allowed him to function within historic time. His myth was always more grand than his reality. His story, and the recollections of those who knew him, is based as much on embellishment as "historical truth." This is where notions of "narrative truth" fit in. Thomas was more comfortable with stories and myths. This was his playground.

Eliade (1963) would dichotomize between mythical (/sacred) and historical (/ profane) time in *Myth and Reality* . For modern man/woman, the historical becomes one of a few occasions to commune with the infinite. The brilliance of modern literature involves its lessons about the porous lines between historical and mythical time. (For the skeptics, witness *Remembrance of Things Past* by Proust.) "History is not about the future or the past, but an ever flowing present," Goethe wrote. Lives intersect with an eternal through connection with Goethe's ever flowing present. Although I view the world from the lens

of Elaine's (1954: 152) modern man, I choose not to dichotomize Eliade's, "eternal present of the mythical event" from Goethe's ever flowing present.

The literatures, the stories we read allow the individual to interact h/her historic life into mythic time. They open the possibility of heterogeneous time for the individual. Personal myths are sacred and can take us into mythical time and memory. I differ with Eliade on my view of historical and mystical time. I believe the historic man, modern man can participate in mystical time. Blake, Ginsberg, and Proust all write about moments when they cross a threshold into a mystical vision, when a C.S. Lewis' wardrobe opens into another world and time out of time. Through such a ritual process, Turner (1969: 96) explains: "We are presented... with a "moment in and out of time," and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however feelingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be."

To an extent, Turner's proposition outlines a central component of the life, times, and personal myth of Thomas Meyer. He lead a life of privilege, attending and receiving a doctorate from Harvard, all the while seeking to reject his social class. He partook in the 1950's journey across continents to participate in the generational beatitudes, persuing limit experiences himself at every point possible along the way, eventually calling home to beg for a ticket home after become a street prostitute in West Hollywood. The heat of luminal space, between realities, intrigued him. In the 1960's, he would participate within the underground Boston leather scene, all the while earning his advanced degree in literature by day. Through the rituals of the sadomasochistic theater of pain, among others, Meyer sought to a form of the space and transformation Victor Turner discusses. On an intuitive level, Meyer understood that in the face of luminality, social class breaks becoming insignificant. Meyer understood the transformativite possibility of ritual process to create sacred community space. In the end of his life, having abandoned an academic career, cast off the title as doctor, spent a quarter of a century in South West Texas, and stricken with disease, Thomas' happiest times were during AA meetings within the grittiest of meeting

spaces where he could listen to other failed war stories.

In the *Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz (1973:16) stipulates:

The claim to attention of an ethnographic account does not rest on the author's ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask or a carving, but on the degree to which he is able to clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce the puzzlement--what manner of men are these?--to which unfamiliar acts emerging out of unknown backgrounds naturally give rise.

Along such lines I do not hope merely to tell the story of my relationship with Tom, the first person I ever knew to die of AIDS. Instead, I would like to position the life story this man who, if he was alive today, could go back to Germany and be entitled to claim a title of Count, into a place and time. I would like to position Tom's story, part W.W.I story, part illness narrative, and the ideas propelling the narrative into a proper place within their intellectual history.

Again, Clifford Geertz (1973:346) writes, "All ethnography is part philosophy, and a good deal of the rest is confession." I have emphasized the position of myself, the author, the storyteller, my father, and the story - our memory of Tom. Through the thematic narrative of my memories, then my father's memories, (and later others), I would like to place the AIDS story into its right and proper place within 20th century intellectual history. As I write in the introduction to *White Nights and Ascending Shadows*, I see the AIDS era as inheriting the anxieties of the Weimar era. Zuckmayer writes in his review of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, uncertainty was a fate which W.W.I forced upon the century. "It draws everyone into the fate of this generation." He concludes: "We are the ones whose lives began with the knowledge of the ultimate and greatest thing of earthly existence - of the most terrible, the mortal abandonment of man, and the highest, comradeship."

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In *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*, Peter Brooks (1994:25) notes:

The psychoanalytic version of the human psyche is somehow "true," that it corresponds to one's own experiences and insights. Particularly, where aesthetics are concerned, it implies that the psychoanalytic view of humans as radically determined by sexuality has a general validity. By sexuality, I do not mean simple genitality, but rather large conceptualizations of the self as a sexual being, both deriving from and producing issues of gender difference, origins, and self definition. Sexuality belongs not simply to the physical body, but to the complex of fantasies and symbolization's which largely determined identity.

This desire is governed by laws, expressed, negotiated, and channeled through plot narratives within the social setting.

Within the context of Thomas's life and death from HIV/AIDS, Freud's "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" takes special significance. He writes: "What it thus creates is a daydream or fantasy, which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and from the memory." Given the inactive virus is transmitted, quite often through a actualization of a fantasy, only to be discovered years later within the person's system, the individual memory of, or "trace of the memory from which provoked it" becomes quite significant. Freud elaborates that desire drives the formation and evolution of our narratives. "Thus past, present, and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them."

Desire is often a mystery. It drives this narrative forward. Thomas battled his sexual identities and worlds - both as a straight and as a queer man. In the early seventies, he went through a psychoanalysis to rid himself of queer desire. His queer identity moved back in the closet. But his embrace with the leather communities he discovered as a bartender at Keller's, a bar in the West Village of pre Stonewall New York City, would accompany him until his final days. These drives propel Thomas' life story. From the

ways Greek Tragedy informed Athenian Democracy to Leonardo DaVinci's sublimated eros, the dance with the unconscious wishes takes coal and creates civilization. Ann Pelligrini (1997:3) notes, "Psychoanalysis is a powerful cultural narrative, providing patters of order and interpretation for telling, retelling, and making sense of life experiences, and this is no less the case when the story told emerges in reaction against psychoanalysis."

Jonathan Lear posits that psychoanalysis offers us a lens with which to seek to understand the real meaning in irrational acts. Thomas, as a student of poetry, lived out Homer's insight from the tale of the Lotus Eaters that the greatest human instinct is to ingest the thing that will destroy us. As such, this narrative seeks to understand and make peace with the process of ritual destruction within the life of Thomas Meyer.

Chapter One

Winter 1991, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

"Tom Died," the black ink note the White Angel had written announced. I don't know when they got the name, but the White Angels were the ladies who worked the front desks in all the Vassar College dorms. They took notes for all incoming phone calls. I was living in Jossyln dorm during my junior year. The years pass by within our lives. It had been years since I had really known Tom and now a note, a little three by three inch square piece of paper hanging on a rack with other notes for other students, announced in two words that it was over. Mom told me she would call if anything changed in his condition. The death watch hadn't been that long. That's the way it went in those early days. Dad had only told me the previous summer...

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As the years passed, images of enigmatic components of Tom's life and life story recalled by my parents resonated. Dad was Tom's freshman roommate from Cambridge, 1956. Whenever I would see them, we would talk about him. In these co-narrated stories, the concept of the lost friend whose life I never completely knew unfolds. This story opens a good number of possibilities in the respect of awe, mystery, and I guess regret. But, as much as regret eats at people, intrigue entices. Here lays the warmth the story contains. Its a simple story of knowledge and enlightenment. In engaging with these narratives, we watch as my eyes are opened. I know this; I live in the story after all.

My story has more to do within the young man's awareness that a few of the people out there are gyms. There really are diamonds in the rough. Occasionally, when we find one of these gyms (i.e. Tom), our whole lives take huge twists in fate. At the heart of the matter lays the intrigue we feel. So we must ask, what happens at the moment of complete intrigue?

Reader, as you enter this story, try to imagine the sounds of Louie Armstrong's solo in "Mac the Knife." Visualize Marlene Deitrich's legs in a black and white photo of her performing in a cabaret. To set the stage, recall the old world notes and first words of Kurt Weil's greatest story: "You are about to hear an opera for beggars sense this opera was conceived with the splendor only a beggar could imagine and sense it has to be so cheap even a beggar could afford it, it is called "The Three Penny Opera." As the century ends its easy for us forget, but for some, the attempt to make meanings of an era without a world view created a duress which tore their very lives apart.

What happened?

What went wrong with Thomas Meyer?

Where did he fall off track?

Cruising the Obits

December 1993, Mom took me to see Tony Kushner's "Angel's in America." Frank Rich had suggested this was the story of our time. The play had won every major award for theater that year. An early scene elaborated on underlying messages within an early '80's AIDS diagnosis:

Roy: No, say it. I mean it. Say: "Coy Cohn, you are a homosexual."
(Pause)

And I will proceed, systematically, to destroy your reputation and your practice and your career in New York State...(p.44)

Roy Cohn explained to his doctor of some thirty years. Cohn's doctor was in the process of notifying Cohn, who he had treated for rectal genital warts in the past, that he had AIDS. Cohn explains to Henry, his doctor, the label 'homosexual' signifies a lack of clout. "Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a passant anti-discrimination bill through City Council." They have no clout. They are people, "who know nobody and nobody knows. Does this sound like me, Henry?" Cohn's doctor replies no. Having said all this, Cohn again asks his doctor for a diagnosis. "You have AIDS, Roy," Henry replies. "No, Henry, no. AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer." (P.46). And I thought of Tom, a common occurrence in those days. He had always loved theater. Tom's presence never really left, especially after I moved into the disease epicenter, San Francisco. I hated to think the influence such forces had on Tom. He had spent twenty years concealing his sexuality. I had wondered why Tom was not more forthcoming with me about his diagnosis back in '85 and '86 back when I first got to really know him.

Like a generation of wanna-be-writers, I had moved to San Francisco to find my voice. The lure of Kerouac, Ginsberg, North Beach, and City Lights Bookstore still

entices. The first few weeks in San Francisco were a quick lesson in the economics of supply and demand. The city was flooded with writers with B.A.'s willing to work for nothing. I was nothing special. Having applied and been rejected at several writing jobs, I finally got my big break with the *Bay Area Reporter*, a local gay paper. As chance would have it, there was one beat in which demand outnumbered supply for writers - the obits.

The epidemic was running on ten plus years without anything close to a cure. Reports from the previous summer's Ninth International Conference on AIDS in Berlin notified the world that none of the treatment leads of the previous year or decade, for that matter, had proven worthwhile. And the local papers were hiring obituary writers.

It was almost impossible to live in San Francisco without knowing there was an AIDS epidemic going on. AIDS was on every billboard, in every newspaper. "I glance at the front page [of local gay paper, the *Bay Area Reporter*] but the obits are the first thing I look at.... its become a habit," one long time San Franciscan recalled (Boyer, 1994:7). In those days, the *B.A.R.* published some 30 obits of people with AIDS a week. They had done this since 1984 and would continue to do so until either the government put a genuine effort into fighting the epidemic or there was a cure (Boyer, 1994:7).

By the 1994, the year of the Nixon whitewash, the obituaries served as a device to settle scores, identify winners, report on the losers, and to sensationalize the newsworthy. When *The New York Times* broke with its tradition and actually acknowledged that Roy Cohn had died of "AIDS," not some code word for immune complications, naming the disease had been used as one more attack on a dying person (Bronski, 1988b:136).

Through covering the obit beat, I could get to the bottom of the who, what, when and why of the a public health hazard which had existed within a subterfuge for the last decade. A lot of people blamed the obfuscation of the disease for the inattention the disease received. The who, what, when, and why of HIV had never been anything but problematic for the entire decade. And as the years passed, the face of AIDS become easier to de emphasize.

AIDS was more a of clandestine affliction. *B.A.R.* editor Al Ross explained: "The mainstream press would run standard, paid obits, but refused to list lovers and sexuality" (Boyer, 1994:7). Shilts (1987:178) writes:

Concealing an AIDS diagnosis in a death notice was nothing unusual in these times. In the first years of AIDS, obituaries disguised the reality that an epidemic was stealing the lives of the renowned, not just the better publicized profligates. One had to read the obituaries closely to understand this. to look for the vague long illness or the odd refernce to a pnemoniah or skin cancer striking down someone in, say, their mid-thirties. People, especially in the plutocracy, didn't die of some homosexual disease, accored to the death notices, they just wasted away after a "long illness"

The most depressing part when thinking about Tom was the feeling that maybe he, himself, had assumed, "people, especially in the plutocracy, didn't die of some homosexual disease.." He had viewed homosexual desire as a form of sickness, which for years during the seventies he had tried to rid himself of although, as Dad would point out, he had known he was gay all his life. I didn't know. It was hard to put together. AIDS consciousness was not exactly at a peak level in Lubbock, TX., where Tom had spent those final years. He certainly hadn't been out about his disease. I didn't even know if anyone had even written an obituary for Tom. What would it have said? The who, what, when, where, and why for Tom could prove a meaty obit worth reading....

Initial Impressions

Some Time in the Early Eighties, Dallas, TX.

In order to get to the bottom of the who, what, when, why and where, I began sketching notes, reconstructing memories. Thomas was always dad's drinking buddy from years past. As a kid, I remember coming downstairs and finding Tom rolled up, asleep in a little ball, under one of the side tables in the living room. Tom was living in Monahannes, a teeny town in South West, Texas, at the time. He was busy trying to get his foot in the

door of the oil business. We were in Dallas, having just moved from the gentility of Atlanta. These Texans appeared a tad rough. It seemed mighty uncomfortable there under the living room table. Something about the previous night's booze and life experience has helped him to be at ease in contorted circumstances. I found the whole thing quite funny. I also thought this guy was a bit of a bum but he was Mom and Dad's friend.

Later that night he put on a tie. It was the first time I had ever saw him in a suit and it shocked me. In knowing him most of my life I could never recall him wearing anything but his Lee Jeans, a plaid shirt, cowboy boots, and a jimmy cap. "Tom, what are you doing wearing a tie? I didn't even know you owned one," I told him in a peak Dallas prep school brat phase. "Well there was a time in my life when I used to wear them all the time." He told me in a less than way that where he came kids my did not speak to their elders like that. The role of Tom the arbiter of filial piety did not really become him. He just didn't have the heart for it. But, of course, this had much less to do with a formality than it did with his hung overness and lack of interest in being pushed around by a young ten year old kid. In a funny sort of way he was aware of how out of sorts he must have looked to me.

We had made family trips to visit Tom in Monahannes throughout our Texas years. I'd bet on horse races with him at the Rio Dosa Downs in New Mexico. Tom took us to eat at Kermit's Drive Inn, which had burgers which were way too big to try to eat, Peg and Tom always made a point to tell me that. Kermit's was the only real hang out in the desolate West Texas town. It was one of those places where served the burgers and fries in wooden baskets. Fresco size wall paintings entitled the prophets hung: Jesus, Marilyn Monroe, and Dallas Cowboy coach, Tom Landry, on the other. Tom smiled when he pointing them out. Tom always put a great time into trying to show us his Texas.

On another trip, we went to Metamorris, the Mexican border town just south of El Paso, for Christmas. As we sat in traffic over the Rio Grande, I commented on a Kentucky Fried Chicken billboard with Spanish wording. "Its so good you want to lick you your fingers afterward," Tom translated. "Not quite possible to translate 'Finger licking good,'"

he noted, "but you can learn Spanish by paying attention to things like that. That's how I learned it."

Tom had married a former student from his teaching days. Peg complained incessantly about drivers who drove under the requisite, ten miles faster than the 55 mile per hour speed limit. "They think they are right," she screamed at which point I realized the whole affair was not a joke but that she was very mad "they are wrong, what they are doing is wrong." Peg ran the marriage.

Years later Dad would recall, "He chose highly masculine women both times he chose to relate. He chose women who were for all of their characteristics. The first was Peg and then Danny. Now there is a world of difference between the characters of Peg and then Danny. But if you wanted to have character who could be a saint, an icon for the feminist movement it would be Peg. Here you've got a horseback riding west Texas girl who enters the man's world of the oil patch and succeeds on men's terms. She's an old fashioned icon for feminists. For short she was a sexually voracious, very masculine women. Peg lived like that. Peg was someone who could be exciting to a homosexual who liked to be down."

Peg was Tom's in with the South Texas oil crowd, which in the early eighties was quite a thriving culture. Peg's group always hustled and bussled throughout their house. Dad tried to keep up but it wore at him. "Whenever we go out with them it always turns to talking about oil (pronounced oaaal)," he would complain. Tom, as much as he tried, never quite convinced me he was really part of that subculture.

Trips to Tom's house and the odd entourage which can with it served as a prerequisite for Dad and Tom to do what they always did when they got together - get drunk. As usual, Dad and Tom were a bit involved in activities which seemed particularly adult. A danger accompanied life there. Tom had cable TV which carried "R" rated movies which we could never see at home. So my brothers and I sat up watching the lurid cruelties inherent within the late '70's/early '80's crime genre, repulsed but curious. I remember

trying to fall asleep one night while listening to Dad and Tom watch the movie, *The Dearhunter*. The movie took four Viet Nam veterans through the war and its cruel implications. "You can make it," one kept on screaming as he watched his friend being whipped during what seemed like an especially long torture scene. I wondered how dad and Tom could watch. I had never even seen Dad watch TV. They sat up all night after the movie. The story about a group of men coming home ideologically shocked kept Dad and Tom up all night talking, fixated. Dad's identified with the sadness of the death of a notion of country; Tom with the limits the body could endure, both transfixed with macabre. In later years, I realized that the two of them had something between them which defied my own understanding; they had been through such matters and heavier before; essentially there was a perverse element to their friendship. The interaction was something they shared.

The twelve hour trips back up to Dallas didn't tend to be happy affairs. And so all the trips to Monahan's always went, Tom seemed to be such a wreck and mom and dad were always a bit disappointed with him. Of course, there was always the subject of their own crumbling relationship but it was easier to talk about Tom.

a winter night in '85

I came home from an evening, I was sixteen at the time, only to find dad and Tom sitting doing some drinking in the dining room.

Tom came up to me and told me and gave me a hug at which point he realized that I thought I was a huge drunk. Dad told me he was going to be staying with us for a while. Tom said we'd talk the next morning about things. The next day dad told me Tom was an alcoholic and breaking up with Peg.

Indian Food and the Inwood Theatre

The crash in Texas oil prices wasn't far off and Tom seemed to know it. That era

was over. Dad had a great deal of business and travel to attend to and Mom had moved out. She was doing her doctoral work at Bryn Mayr. So, for a few months there in 1985, a majority of my time at home I spent with Tom.

Saturday mornings we'd drive over through across town, through seedy, prostitute ridden Hairy Hines, to Walnut Hill, to Kabab and Curry, for the weekend Indian Buffet. We lived down the street from the Inwood Theater, a local art house. That fall, "Shoa", the eight hour Holocaust documentary, "A Trip to Bountiful," Geraldine Page's last movie, "RAN," Akira Kurosawa's King Lear, showed. "I'll definitely go see Shoa," Tom planed. "You could stay that long?" I asked. "Don't you even go see two movies in a row?" "No," I lied. "Oh, well I've gone to two and three movies in a row all my life." Tom was not always around. He'd leave for weekends and ten day periods. When he was around we saw a lot of movies.

I had orthroscopic surgery on my knee that September. Mom had moved out two weeks previous so my older brother, Hank, had taken me to the hospital and got me to the first couple of days of school before he went back for his Sophomore year of college. Tom stayed in Hank's old bedroom. I spent the rest of the football season inside doing rehabilitation. My younger brother had been shipped off to prep school. Dad spent a lot of time sitting in the dark in the living room drinking by himself. Life at home wasn't quite the same.

One of the first movies Tom and I went to was "A Trip to Bountiful." In it an aging Geraldine Page had planned to make a final trip to her old home town. She had to plan to find a bus route, buy a ticket, plan her day, make sure she had proper traveling shoes and the like. She told everyone she was going back to Bountiful. And finally, late in the story, she actually looked back at what her childhood home had become. It would be her last trip to bountiful. After the movie, I was a bit depressed sitting around the old house. Tom just listened to me talk about missing living in Atlanta when the whole family was together.

Tom and Dad bought me records for my 16th birthday. Dad had always stayed with the Baroque, the Bach, the Handel. Two were country albums, Jerry Jeff Walker and James Taylor's greatest, and then Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto with Van Cliburn playing. Tom told lots of stories about Van Cliburn who'd left international stardom to live with his mother in Ft. Worth, another perspective on Texas. The presence of Romantic period classical music brought a fresh perspective into the household. We listened to lots of Mendelssohn. Chopin's "Nocturns" were his favorite. He'd just about gotten to play in Carnegie Hall with Leonard Bernstein, the story went... but it just didn't work out.

Tom, always one to attempt to explain his image of Texas, described the country music as the songs of cowboy who has lost his land, separated from a part of himself. "If I can just get off of that LA freeway without getting killed across, down the road in a cloud of smoke, for some land that I aint bought, bought, bought... If I can just get off of that LA freeway without getting killed across..." Jerry Jeff sang.

That December, everyone reconverged in Dallas. Mom's strained marriage with Dad glaring her in the face. I was off getting high with my friends leaving my little brother, who had lost some 30 pounds at prep school, at home on his own. John was off with his old high school friends. In the midst of all this, word came from South Georgia that Granddad had died. Dad had been in Georgia for a few days previous on a Death watch. Dad had asked Tom to get the family to Georgia. The following day, Tom helped pack us into his long, tan 1977 Cadillac with an odd, puke like odor. "What a stupid car," Hank would recall. Tom's was Hank's official Godfather. Over the two day trip Tom would introduce his to another regional delight of his, *Poppy's Cajun Fried Chicken*.

"Late, one of those nights on the trip when everyone else was asleep, I asked Tom what had happened, how come he had ended up staying in South, Texas for all those years," Hank remembered after Thomas' death. "He got sick of trying to please his father.... And after a while, it stopped mattering to him. He knew he could not please him so he stopped trying..."

We arrived in Thomasville late in the evening. "Oh, hi Tom," my somewhat worn out Grandmom greeted him with familiarity. At that point, she'd known Tom for some 30 years. Dad thanked Tom for driving us. Days unfold; nights unfold.

The next day, through one lane winding roads lined with tall, tall trees we stopped at a white house deep in the woods outside Thomasville, looking much like a plantation. We were greeted by a family friend, who though I had never known her, greeted us like family. Pieces of pasts I had never known of, passing in front of my eyes.

"This is difficult," Mom warned us at the funeral home. She'd buried her parents thirty years previous. And she walked us into the parlor to see granddad's white, pasty body sitting there in a suit. It was the first dead body I had ever seen. The next day we got back in Tom's stupid Cadillac, had some more Cajun fried chicken and drove back to Dallas. I started getting depressed that winter.

Ecstasy and Weimar

Mom gave me a copy of Brett Easton Ellis' first novel, *Less Than Zero*, for Christmas. I devoured the story about college freshman's stoned vacation home for the holidays. Tom borrowed the story and, as was his habit, he finished novel in a night. Tom, still unemployed with loose ends, read a great deal of the pop trash I was bringing home. One of those evenings, he told me he sensed glimmers of a new note of nihilism taking hold.

I didn't really understand his point. The following quarter, Mom went back to Pennsylvania, Hank to Minnesota, etc... Tom began disappearing more and more. And my medicinal career really took off. Amidst teenage revelries, I discovered my first tastes of MDMA, (or ecstasy.) We could buy it over the counter at Big Daddy's, one of the cities gay bars. "Two tabs please," you'd ask, your heart pounding as the bartender didn't blink, leaned over behind the purple glowing, fluorescent lighted bar, opened a money box, and put two pills in a 3' by 3' zip lock bag for you. Those were not far removed from the days

when Dallas psychiatrists wrote their analyses could, by speaking without inhibitions, break to ground in two or three sessions what usually took six months. There was a lot of experimentation going on Dallas.

We just took it because it made running around the grocery store in Cedar Springs all the more fun; not that possibilities for safe Eros and intimacy usually unavailable to high school kids whose previous closest grasp of intimacy amounted to acquiescence. On ecstasy, boys and boys, boys and girls, girls and girls and boys, boys and boys and girls, or whatnot might end up spending the evening at the Wok, a Chinese restaurant next door to Big Daddy's, sitting across from each other in a booth, holding hands, staring at each others bulging pupils, grinding their teeth away, munching ice cubes peaking their brains out.

By the end of the quarter, depressions had begun accompany things; I had flunked English, and modern European history required additional effort. We were roaring through the revolutions of 1848, god being dead, and the like so Tom offered to guide me through a clearer look at the questions at hand. 20th century pathos was his bread and butter. "This is where the real education begins," he would explain.

Thus began Tom's seminar in post WWI cinema. We watched the movie, "Cabaret" and Tom pointed out the champagne drinking, the decadence. He made me listen to "Mac the Knife" over and over, and Tom pointed out the violence, the underground. When we watched Fritz Lang's, "M" with its sympathies for the criminal, a chill ran down my back. In the final scene when the vigil-anti crowd runs out to find a scapegoat to blame for their world gone mad, Peter Lorre screams: "At least I know I am an animal. What about you? I know I there are times when I absolutely detest myself." Tom fixated on a theme, identified by Sigfried Kracaur in his review of "The Blue Angel," which he thought pertained to all our stories. Kracaur begs the central question about 20 century identity: "Do individual destinies and psychology not exist after the war as they did before?"

We watched Marlene Deitriche in "Blue Angel" and Tom pointed out the wail of the

humiliated school master. "I measure a movie's quality by the way I remember a sound or an image. I never stop thinking or hearing the sound of the cry of the schoolmaster" when broken by Marlene Deitriche. The order within a world which had propelled his students to revere him crumbled in front of his very eyes.

Kracauer fixated on the agony reflected in the professor's face. "The spiritual events, which today more than ever belong in a transparent casing, are dragged into the open and with visual and acoustic close-ups are turned into the main outward events: this has its justifications." Karauer elaborates on the question of the existence of interior life in a world devoid of world view. He writes:

If the outer conditions of our existence are to move out of our consciousness than the inner life must rush to fill exterior can disappear unnoticed. An inverted glove - the inside becomes the outside so that he outside is made invisible, and Jannings can crow as loudly as he likes. The appearance of lost inwardness which otherwise would serve no purpose is here just right as the substitute for outer reality....

And finally the screeching and clattering; the sadism and the battle cries at the end: what a hopeless comparison between hullabaloo and meaning is set up here. But the hullabaloo is required to conceal the lack of meaning.

Kracauer concludes that "The Blue Angel" has served as a case study for a public life in which, "there is nothing left but a cloud of reality." It describes a world the moderns are left to inhabit, illustrating, "that in the long run all attempts to escape are in vain as they lead to a gaping void."

A lot of the days, I would skip meetings to talk with Tom. As class reading, I was assigned, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. At some point after Spring vacation, Tom and I got to sit down and talk shop.

"So what do you guys do when you go out?" he asked in his interested, yet respectful way.

"We party," I replied.

"What's going on when you go 'partying?' In Monahannes when we say that it means we are going out to get drunk."

"That's pretty much what we do."

He gave a better notion of what I needed to be looking for in the novel. He helped me give the story a tight look. We talked about feeling let down by things as had the soldiers in the story. We talked about the message of the scream of the schoolmaster, his values and authority which lead the German boys to the front. Remarque wrote about what those soldiers understood from the second the first bombs crashed:

The idea of authority, which they represented, was associated in our minds with a greater insight and a manlier wisdom. But the first death we saw shattered this belief. We had to recognize that our generation was more to be trusted than theirs. They surpassed us only in phrases and cleverness. The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they taught it to us broke into pieces.... And we saw that there was nothing of their world left. We were all at once terribly alone; and alone we must see it through. (p.12)

Never in my life had I so closely identified with a text, or with an endeavor. As dad drank in the dark living room or ran off on business, my mom took on her graduate work, Hank and Erich left for school, and I was left to my own devices. My entire cohort was engaged in the same struggle/crusade - to make the best of days after divorces, separations, diversion & substance, negotiating between desire and an impending set of responsibilities. Whether he meant this or not, I have no idea, but I think a single sentiment ran through all discussions. As far as Tom was concerned we were all children of the western front. In looking at the world through such a lens, my struggles entered a vast cavalcade.

Carl Zuckmayer reviewed *All Quiet* in *Berliner Illstrirte Zeitung*, January 1929. This novel, he wrote, has been lived by millions. He instructed that the story was not to be read like other novels but should be approached: " - rather like one succumbs to one's fate, to the inescapable in one's time and existence, like one lays hold of it and like one is laid

hold of, like one bleeds, like one struggles, like one dies." This is not a typical war novel about the good guys and the bad guys, as much as it is a story concerning:

...the fundamental fact of our life and future being, with the primal stratum, and with the cellular core of centuries. This is the war as we experiences it at the front - we, a very definite generation formed in only a few years, who had no life before the war, no form, and no content, who were born of the war and crushed by it, and who - along with its dead - live on beyond the war as a singular new beginning.

Remarque convinces every reader, we are born of the ashes of this war. The experiments with boys, girls, ecstasy, and loneliness were all part in parcel attempts to forge some sort of path following this, "singular new beginning." And in the end, the meanings we make of our world come in 15 or 16 disparent parts. In all those movies, books, and the like, Tom helped one make meaning of such experiences. Zuckmayer writes, "It draws everyone into the fate of this generation." Weimar's inflation was our destination, its fall was our fate, its proclivities toward tyranny, its remnants were our fate. We were part of that new beginning, whatever that meant...

Lubbuck and Beyond

School proceeded. My Weimar history report garnered a B-. Those following years I didn't see as much of Tom. He moved out that spring, off to Texas Tech in Lubbuck to get his second advanced degree. And I drank, pill popped, smoked, and otherwise generally groped my way through the final two years of high school. Tom would drop by the house and it was always great to see him.

While in Lubbuck, Tom met another woman at an A.A. meeting. They decided to marry after Tom was diagnosed with AIDS. He'd had it the whole time he'd lived at home, "but he made me promise to keep the secret," Dad explained. "He's got a sympathetic veterinarian prescribing him meds and writing that he has lots of pets."

Summer after sophomore year in college, I flew to Lubbock to see him. He looked gaunt, skin tight in his jaws but it was Tom. He wore his jeans, jimmy cap, and boots worn down, same posture, same stance. We went for Mexican food when he picked me up. I surveyed the bookshelves at his house. We talked about Latin fiction. He advised me that if I was ever shooting up, putting syringes into bleach would kill the virus and prevent transmission. I guess his attitude with me was one of you never know. I left with the name of a new author in my pocket written on his business card, "Jorge Louis Borges." Tom was sending me off into the labyrinth.

We got in a fight on the phone the last time we talked. I left a story I was working on for a local magazine in Lubbock and had called Tom to see if he could fax it to me.

"I'll just put it in the mail," Tom responded.

"You can't fax it?" I asked.

"No, I can't fax it."

"Why?"

"Oh for god sakes, because I don't know how to run one of those machines!" he retorted an irritated voice. Point made, so I dropped the it. He had helped me edit the story but without that draft of the story I would not be able to use his edits before deadline. We agreed that it had been great to see each other, and that was it. That was the last time I ever talked with him.

That Fall I changed course, driving east Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, 90 minutes north of Manhattan. While there I wrote a successful intellectual history seminar on Latin American Fiction, utilizing Borges' ficciones as the cornerstone of the work. The following winter, I signed up for a class, jointly taught by the History, Philosophy, Music, and German departments, only offered once every four years. The class was entitled, "German Culture at the Turn of the 20th Century." I sent Tom a copy of the syllabus and asked if he had any suggestions as to what subject I should address for the seminar paper. Tom died before the letter got to Lubbock.

Chapter Two

Finding out I had been hired at the paper was the best news Dad had gotten in ages, or at least he made it sound that way. The years previous had been trying for the old man. He had lost his mother and first wife in one summer only to lose his best friend later that year, and his brother a year later. As I was at the paper, the idea of writing an obit for the man had gotten Dad's attention. As such I would need some information about the man. At first Dad was reticent. Finally, on visit to the city, I finally got Dad to sit down with the tape recorder. (From here on out, the narrator's voice will be in italics.)

Narrating a Life

Tell me about meeting Tom Meyer?

Well, Tom was my freshman roommate.

What did you think when you first met him? What was your take on his your first couple of days?

Um, Tom was a Yankee.

A point against him?

A point against him. But his daddy while we were moving in bought a bottle of Canadian club and was very generous with Tom's roommates. We drank Canadian Club and ginger ale. C & C. Canadian and Ginger - a vile drink. It still brings fumes of (breathing in and grimacing) nausea. A hang-over which will forever come back if I smell that combination. Just thinking about it makes me feel kind of queasy. Tom and I got so disastrously drunk on Canadian Club and Ginger Ale and so sick on that stuff. We all made friends in a hurry.

Stories didn't last that long at first. He would clap his hands together and

proclaim, "well, that's enough story telling for now."

Finally, I gave him a tape recorder, some tapes and suggested that he continue on the road back to Chicago. It was then that the Tom story really began to unfold. Two months later, I got a package in the mail with the tape inside.

Dad talking on the Road from SF to Chicago

I'm sitting in the car driving through the badlands of North Dakota and it seems a pretty appropriate place to talk about Tom.

Tom would have loved North Dakota. He would have loved Montana where I spent three days wandering around. For your information I may end up living in Montana; I may end up going into the cattle business there. Georgia may be swapped for a spread in Montana, god damned people there.

Anyhow, Tom, what is there to say about Tom? Tom as you know comes from a Prussian background. As far as his dads concerned the main Mayer is Prussian. His father was the member of Plainly Prussian nobility, counts. If Ernest Mayer had stayed in Prussia he would have had the title of Count Von Feffer. Tom, I'm sure has shown you his ring with the mount on it, the seal ring for the Count Von Feffer which he would have been entitled to wear and use officially in Prussia.

At any rate, Tom's dad a was technical Prussian Junker coming out of the Hegelian tradition in which the government was considered the highest form of the intellect and the highest form that government that humanity had reached and probably the apex of civilization, as was understood perhaps the final apex. At any rate, a lot of arrogance going on in here with the philosopher Hegel, you can look up in your funny book about Philosophy for Beginners, a very pro the Prussian government, a lot of arrogance. Tom's dad went to the German equivalent of Annapolis, the name of which I do not know.

And in 1918 was graduated, entitled to be an Insens in the German navy specifically trained as a U boat officer. In 1918 the career opportunities in Germany for a highly

trained U-boat officer were sunk as deep as most of the submarines. Germans were prohibited by the Versailles Conference from possessing submarines for obvious historical reasons. So Tom's Dad is now from impoverished aristocracy with no means to make a living. So he's bumming around Berlin for a while and become a very good poker player through this he made his living which threw him nicely into the Berlin Weimar night life that Tom's told you so much about. He actually knew Lotte Lenya and all the Berlin scene which you see in Christopher Isherwood's "I Am a Camera" and subsequently put into the movie "Cabaret" was the early part of the time, the pre Nazi, was Tom's father milieu.

Christopher Isherwood, Lotte Lenya, Berlin, and the like - through Dad's narrative, the roots Tom's fixation with W.W.I unfolded in front of my very eyes. "Isherwood's was a rare, resplendent kind of life, with a sensibility forged in the aftermath of the first European meltdown" (Mendez, 1997: 8). As such, it's difficult not to think, both from what Dad explained and I knew, that both Tom and his father's fate were formed within the same forces.

This being the case, then what exactly does it mean for a person to have their, "sensibility forged in the aftermath the first European meltdown" ? Tom's father, Ernst, had been trained to be a German U-boat officer, to follow in the proud Junker tradition of military service. The armistice after the war outlawed such military operations. Ernst's had inherited an both an obsolete professional training and set of values. Ernst had stumbled into the underground when his profession crumbled. Artur Landberger described the Berlin Underworld as a place in which, "They do not distinguish what is to be values from what is to be despised in bourgeois institutions." Ernst's future would involve a path into the future with one foot firmly planted in values and ideology which brought about the great W.W.I in the first place.

Thomas' world would be one of a generation which struggled with the implications of the rejection of old world values. In his 1929 essay, "The Longing of Our Time for World View," Herman Hesse discussed a yearning of born the need of all citizens to make

sense of a "new image of the world's surface" seen all over the world since industrialization, which "correspond to an upheaval in the human mind and soul." The years after World War I only succeeded in accelerating the pace of this process until, as Hesse continues, "one can, without exaggeration, identify the death and dismantling of the culture into which the elder among us were raised as children and which then seemed to us eternal and indestructible."

And adaptation was the most difficult chapter to face within the story. Hesse continues, "If the individual has not changed (he can do this within two generations no more than any animal species could), then at least the ideals and fictions, the wishes and dreams, and mythologies and theories that rule our intellectual life have; they have changed utterly and completely." If Hesse is right, that the generation of W.W.I can not hope to adapt any faster in two generations than any animals could then, perhaps the uncertainty of the post war era his father Earnst inherited, would also be his.

Uncertainty was a fate which W.W.I forced upon the century. "It draws everyone into the fate of this generation," Zuckmayer writes in his review of Remarque's 'All Quiet. "Alone we must see it through," the young soldier recalled of the death of authority of those elders who got his generation involved in the conflict. Hesse elaborates on what exactly confronted the generation of 1918. "Destroyed and lost for the greater part of the civilized world are, beyond all else, the two universal foundations of life, culture and morality: religion and customary morals. Our life is lacking ... in a traditional, sacred, unwritten understanding about what is proper and becoming between people" And without such understandings, without culture and morality, Earnst Meyer entered the Berlin underground.

Within this void of traditional morality, Hesse called for a, "yearning search" for another set of values and ways of living. This search took Earnst to America where he had his first and only son, Tom. But before that he had a little money to make in another urban center and bastion of morality, the City of New Orleans. Dad continued:

But that's a tenuous way to make a living and Tom got to working with some kinfolk, a Tom Ernst Mayer that is got to working with some kinfolk and got a start in the import/export business. The import/export business took him to Mexico where he had adventures and caught typhoid fever and that's the reason Herr Mayer, who you probably met at some point or another with his heavy German accent was highball bald, skewbald, lost all his hair in the typhoid fever.

At any rate, the import/export business took him up to New Orleans. In New Orleans he met MaryBell, what was her last name, I'll try to remember that, its important because the father as an Englishmen with a French name in the import/export business made a lot, I mean a lot of money and he married into old New Orleans, Louisiana wealth so MaryBell Mayer as she became after she married Ernst was half British and half Labear. She was a member of the New Orleans Lebear family with enormous holdings in sugarcane and, subsequently, of course oil. The family's got a couple of genuinely historic, vintage 1820s mansions in Louisiana. So Ernst married a lot of wealth. While you never knew that because of the couple lived a very plain middle class life, they always had a lot of money and that money was MaryBells. And as you are aware from your dad's existence, that's not a cheap way to get wealthy, you have to earn every dime.

At any rate, probably to get out of Louisiana, and to get away from the arrogance of the Labeare family. The arrogance of a family that's got money towards the people who marry the girls of the family is a little difficult to tolerate. I know that from experience. I don't know if you'll encounter it with your Illges relatives when you eventually inherit your mother's money but my suggestion to you is to get the hell out of any family corporations she's got to the best of your abilities but you may not be able to and you may have to eat shit from those bastards for the rest of your life, thank god I'll never see them again.

At any rate they moved up to New York and settled down in Summit NJ. Earnst worked for the Isbrandson Lines is - ice, brand - fire, son. Old man Isbrandson was son of the ice fire, with all the magnetism of a Viking, he had a lot of warrior energy and a lot of

charisma. Earst coming from Prussian background and needing a strong leader adored Old Man Isbrandson to the point if idolatry and he moved up gradually in the company and he became a vice president. He had a job with Isbrandson which later became the American Isbrandson lines and is still around today I believe. I imagine they lived far more wealthily than his income the way we did in Princeton, and Atlanta and later in Dallas where you grew up obviously we couldn't have lived the way we lived you lived on my income. But we don't have to talk about that.

Anyway, while they were in Summit they gave birth to two children, Tom and Little MaryBelle. Tom, an enormously sensitive boy with an extremely cold and narcissistic mother and a Prussian father, naturally had the classic background to become a homosexual. And talking with Tom I think Tom knew he was a homosexual from the time he first started having sex. I mean by the time 12 came along and he started fantasizing about boys. He did have an affair in high school whose name I forget but who I may remember as I continue to think about Tom. He appeared to be hopelessly in love with her when he first got to Harvard but he also had I think acted out homosexual activity by that time I think his homosexual had become bipolar so I think he'd had homosexual partners about which he never talked with me.

Of the generation of 1918, Zuckmayer writes: "We are the ones whose lives began with the knowledge of the ultimate and greatest thing of earthly existence - of the most terrible, the mortal abandonment of man, and the highest comradeship." Within the void of old world values, Hesse identified a hunger for significance and suggested every member of the generation of 1918 engage in quest. "It is proper that we meet the longing of our time - this yearning search, these experiments, some blinded with passion, other coolly bold - with respect." Within this comradeship, Eros and human connection replaced connection with larger meaning, with faith.

Freshman Year

He arrived at the drive at Harvard. I met him, we were roommates with John Adams from Birmingham, with whom I still keep in quite close contact and who is probably the best non family friend I have got. I become impatient with him but then that's the way it is with friends and then there was Tom. It was remarkable - the two best friends I had in the world at the time before Tom's death were one) Tom and two) John, both of whom I met during an incredible freshman year at Harvard. Lived in the Harvard Yard at Palwerny Hall, Palwerny 13 was our room number, it was in the middle entrance of the second floor. The room was genuinely luxurious by current collegiate standards. It had a big living room with a working fireplace and two small bedroom areas. We flipped and John got the one of the bedroom areas and Tom and I bunked in the second one. We put John with his desk into his room and Tom and I had our desks in the study out in the main room. A magnificent view of Harvard Yard out of two large windows and views out of our back windows back into Cambridge common. Couldn't had better quarters. The place was built in 1812. It was wonderful. We shared another bathroom with a sweet on the other side with some guys that I never picked up with. One of them, Bruce Albert, as a matter of a fact was teaching chemistry while I was there. I never looked him up.

At any rate, John and Tom and I had, as it turns out, an immense amount in common taste. Very few college freshman will go out and spend money when they don't have much and buy a good brass rug for the living room . We could go over to the Bush Risinger museum and rent pictures which we hung up on the walls, a big framed reproductions. One of them was Van Gogh's Starry Night which I'm sure you are familiar with, hung over the mantle. Its really strange I should not be able to live the others. One were a couple of Albrict Durror sketchings, one was of "Melancholia" and the other was "the night death and the devil." I've subsequently bought "Night, Death, and the Devil" and you've lived with that some place in the study of mine all of your life. That's an important etching to this day and is hanging in my study in Evanstan and will follow me wherever I

go. But we spent money and effort to make the room extremely attractive. You will be interested to know there were no electronics. We didn't have so much as a clock radio much less a music box of any sort. And we studied long and hard and became fast friends on long winter evenings. We would light a fire in the fireplace. Tom, John and I studied long and hard in extremely pleasant surroundings. Towards the end of the evening when we knew we weren't going to study any more we'd on occasion have a glass or two of port to finish things off with to go to sleep. It was almost like Oxford, certainly not the way kids do it today.

I've told you I first met Tom when he and his parents showed up. Hier Mayer was the big man in the family. MaryBeth played very much of a back seat role. We didn't know how much she controlled him. He was the extrovert man who knew sails. He brought a bottle of Canadian club whisky which was extremely good whisky by freshman standards and we immediately doused it with ginger ale and I've told you about our bouts with Canadian Club and ginger ale (sounding philosophical) which will make you violently ill if you drink enough of it. But we didn't, of course, drink enough to become ill while Tom was moving in with his parents but god damned it was a pleasant way to move in and to get acquainted.

We settled into our years work. John was a Birmingham, Alabama gone Sewanee Military Academy, had been wait listed from Harvard and accepted at Princeton so when he finally got accepted at Harvard he turned down Princeton and the rest is history. A Tom, I don't think he applied at any place except Harvard. He went to the Pingrey School and I think he was a super genius there and there was no question he could go anywhere he wanted in the country and Harvard was the place he went. His parents were extremely proud of him with high expectations. And Tom settled down in a sort of desultory fashion to keep those expectations.

What did you guys talk about those first nights?

We made friends in a hurry. Tom went out with a buddy of his. He was always going out

with a fellow names Jim Brested. Ah James Henry Brested was the namesake of his grandfather, the greatest of the American archaeologists at the University of Chicago. He explored the Fertile Crescent. At any rate Brested had gone to the Putney School in Vermont, one of the first really forward schools in Vermont. He was a good skier and he eventually became the captain of the Harvard ski team. Lived to ski. He and these girls used to go up and huddle and shiver in the snow and screw in the winter time. He was in with the outdoors club and the sporting club. This girl was awful looking but she didn't mind screwing in a sleeping bag. But Tom just thought Jim was wonderful. He'd come back in and just bother the shit out of me:

'We've been reading Marx in German and you can't comprehend it any other way,'
'social science, you can't comprehend it any other way, the Russians did a good job of it Tom,' chuckling, Tom would get mad.

He got to playing guitars with Brested. It was real cold. The snow was so deep that it was up to the windows on the first floor. Jim had a room on the first floor. They got to playing the guitars and decided that they wanted to have a finish bath. So, of course, there is no such thing as hot water running out. There is no such thing as hot water not being a pure boil in the central running system. So they went into the shower and turned on the shower of pure scalding hot and let that go for an hour and then they would sprint naked and go and they got into the shower, you know and beat each other with towels until they were really, really, really overheated and then dive through the window into the snow and go rolling and came back in and toweled off. Tom came back into the room and was just ju ju ju just shaking and said: "I just had the m m most marvelous experience." John Adams and I got him huddled up and put him to bed and he had was shivering. The next morning- he had a cold. It was the most awful thing you ever saw. You couldn't breathe. Just horrible. Tom was constantly doing such things.

Vitality ran through the air of Cambridge Fall, 1956. Tom and Jack, our narrator, accepted Hesse's challenge with revelry. Tom delighted in the subversive within reading

his Marx. Freud (1909/1955:262) recalls that Rat Man, perhaps his most famous analysand, would masturbate at times of intellectual excitement: "It was provoked when he experienced especially fine moments or when he read fine passages." Initial components of the Eros unfold within narrative of boyish fun. "They would sprint naked and go and they got into the shower, you know and beat each other with towels until they were really, really, really overheated..." Covert elements of future sexual identities would unfold within other "overheated" moments. Jack would recall glimpses:

Boyish Fun and Games

One night he went out and got to drinking C& C out of a beer bag and he was the most homericly drunk person I had ever seen and I decided he needed to sober up or he'd die. I went in and got his clothes stripped off of him and turned on the cold water unadulterated in the middle of Winter time. And because it was running I'd assumed the pipes hadn't frozen so it must have been 31 degree farenheight. It'd cut you in half. And that thing him in the chest. I thought his chest. was going to implode. I threw him in the shower, turned on the water, and it him foom!!! right on the chest. and huh uuuuuuu, (laughing) and he crashed and he crashed on the other side of the shower stall and I kept steering the water at him until finally he came up to me on his knees and it was just like mad comic book and he got off his knees and lurched up and grabbed me, then he got both of his arms here and I started hearing this: "don't do it anymore," laughing "don't do it anymore." I thought it would sober him.

Why'd you need to sober him ?

Because he was throwing up everywhere and the room was swirling. If it would just stop swirling." I thought I was having pity on him. Oh, god, god god, so I laid him out of the shower and the lasting thing I saw was him sitting in the shower stall playing in his vomit saying, 'out of my mind,....out of my mind,' he just couldn't even get himself out of it.

As will be discussed later, Tom eventually entered the Greenwich Village's pre-Stonewall leather S/M underground. Tom would take the role of the M, or the recipient as is the case here, Dad, of the S. Elements of Tom's future role unfold within this recollection of a man being subjected to, thrown around within a shower, a man begging, "don't do it anymore." My father laughed when recalling the story, confirming his role of the S. I asked my father about interpretation and he agreed, commenting, "Well, you have to remember, Tom and I slept together."

As he was being thrown, Tom would refrain, "out of my mind, out of my mind." A goal of eastern meditation is - the eradication of ego consciousness. This is a route to the highest form of consciousness. Part of the appeal S/M is the dissociation of consciousness (Miller, 1993:378). S/M within Eros would all be part of a route, part of Tom's acceptance of Hesse's challenge of our time, his, "yearning search."

The next morning when I got out of bed he was gone. He was up, he was dressed, shaven, showered, hair brushed, the shower - completely cleaned and it never happened. He wasn't going to talk about it. It never happened. there was nothing to talk about. And John and I thought that if he could get up and get himself together as sick unto death as he must have felt and had the room and the shower smelling perfectly clean so we could go in so that we thought we really ought to leave him alone because he had been super human to get this incident put behind him. So that was something that never happened. Until the day he died he denied he had ever done that.

Letting go of the symbols of the old world would not be simple. Tom would spend the rest of his life denying the draw of the rosary beads. The rejection of elements of his intensely German father's world of discipline and morality world view and the search for other meanings was slowly becoming more and more integrated into his identity. Hesse would suggest, "In times like the present a general impatience and disillusion with both received religious creeds and scholarly philosophies grow; the

demand for new formations, new interpretations, new symbols, new explanations, is infinitely great."

One of Jack's first glimpses of the Tom's rejection of orthodox modes of inquiry and his intense, often highly articulate yearning to find another unfolded when the two college freshman took Arthur Schlesinger Intellectual History of the United States. By the mid '50's Schlesinger's reputation had already been cemented as the nation's premiere American history scholar. Jack recalled:

Schlesinger

Arthur N. Schlesinger had a course. I'm not sure you ever heard of him.

1000 Days.

He was a very well known historian of the time.

As I have told you, we both took Arthur M. Schlesinger 's Intellectual History of the United States. He didn't have a textbook he just gave us a suggested reading list 22 pages long which I faithfully attempted to read and faithfully attended the lectures. Tom thought after two lectures that Schlesinger was an utter fool. His lectures weren't worth going to. Took a look at the reading list and decided that it was full of shit and proposed his own reading list in his study which consisted of his own private reading of the intellectual history of the United States.

Arthur Schlesinger (laughing).

He never went back to his class. he showed up at the final and got a b minus. I read the whole god damned reading list and didn't understand a word of what Schlesinger was saying, I worked my ass off and got a b. It was the most unfair thing I had ever seen. There were some people who knew how to Harvard and some people who didn't. That pretty well was the difference in the quality of our intellects. In the objective sort of way, I had an IQ of 144 and Tom had I would imagine Tom had an IQ of 185.

A Temper

Jack would only recall one occasion in which he fought with Tom. Jack had made a gay joke. Tom had become very, very angry with when the subject or implication of homosexuality unfolded.

Tom said there was something I made a smart remark about. It was some stupid high school throwaway remark. oh, it was about a queer. he got his fists curled up and said 'you take that back,' Of course I had just thought the joke had fallen flat. I had no idea Tom was queer. But after that I had a pretty good idea he was. because he had gotten too hostile about a dumb remark. a crazy guy, the guy was really insane, really insane.

Let me tell you about this guy, this friend. He said before he went to Harvard he could pour boiling water into his eyes. He claimed he was a genius, a musician. He had this high scream bogalooloodododado. You'd hear it all hours of the night. I never knew what happened to him. You'd be out studying at one in the morning- bogalooloodododado some place. He was wandering around some place. He was walking around some place in his memory. Pull an all nighter. You know Tom and I would be pulling an all nighter and working 3 or 4 and hear bogalooloodododado some place. Poor Jerk. You'd see that same blue suit. You'd see him coming in that same poor blue suit. (laughing)

Every day (laughing).

every day. He was out there in his same blue suit some place. Out there being crazy and miserable.

Was he always crazy and miserable?

Yea, Then he fell in love with Tom. Tom couldn't get rid of him. Finally he put the real make on Tom and we found out from this enormous series of crashes. We all came, poked our heads out and Tom was down two flights of stairs and this guy was down at the bottom of the third flight of stairs. He'd hurled him down a flight of stairs and then gone

down and hurled him down another flight of stairs. He told him to stay gone and stay gone for good. And that was the last we saw of him. We decided queer or not Tom's heart was in the right place cause he was getting tired of the guy hanging around him. And Tom had really thrown him out (laughing).

Tom was quite a physical, tough guy even.

The temper around homosexuality could be interpreted as denial but on another level there is more to the story. For Tom, violence and its association with homosexuality may have been what sexuality and affection were all about. Perhaps, Tom was not rejecting the young man in the hall? Maybe he had accepted the young man's pass.

Later I asked, Why do you say Tom was nuts? How did you get to know in the 50s before all the shit went down that he....

I just knew that he protested too hard about the suggestion that he was queer. We were all calling each other queer. It was a friendly insult, you tell someone you are a queer or something. It was like the equivalent of calling someone a jerk off or something. It meant nothing. But it was just really insulting to Tom and just a mindless head insult. We weren't stupid. Non of us were into getting violent with homosexuals. Tom was really seriously into the closet.

Steve and Intellectual Companionship

When I got on the train from New York to Cambridge, I met a fellow by the name of Steve Englesing. Englesing was the guy out in Palo Alto that I did not go out and see because I just didn't think I had anything in common with him any more. Englesing was a big leader of the Iconoclasts at Harvard and Tom was impressed with Englesing out of his mind, as the slang phrases went in those days. Englesing had a black roommate. I asked him how he got settled with a black roommate. I could imagine nothing more awful. Steve told me he had requested one. I was impressed.

Of course, Gregson Davis, I like Gregson a lot. He was a 15 year old genius from

Antigua. He used to soothe himself by playing Mozart and whenever he wanted to get some extra money he'd just look up whatever Latin prize was around and then do it. We talked about that, I mean, you know a Latin poetry prize or a Greek Poetry prize. You got to write a Greek poem. He could write a Greek poem, no sweat. He subsequently became the chairman of the department of classics at Stanford. He left on the diversity issue. He had a fairly straightforward tongue about the comparative worth of African culture and Greek culture and since he was of pure Kukoowoo extract himself he was a clear embarrassment to Stanford. He is now teaching in the classics department at Cornell up in Ithaca. That was Greg and that was Steve.

Steve was a German, a naturalized German, he grew up in Germany. His father was a crooked lawyer in the entertainment business who got stuff on high members of the German command, including members of the Gestapo, so he could get away with a lot of stuff including having a wife who was Jewish and working in the underground in Berlin. He survived the war with a lot of \$. The money he extracted from the well placed Germans he translated into gold and stuck in Switzerland. He had a house in Constance, - Constance, Germany. Right on Lake Constance it was just a matter of going across the lake with gold to deposit it. But his mother was the same sort of intellectual as his father and they realized they could come to the United States. They were the same absolute first people who could come from Europe to the United States after the war. People who had participated in the German underground. Hier took a look at the American scene and realized that the opportunities for graft were slim for a German lawyer and went back to Germany. His parents got divorced. Hier Englesing continued to make lots and lots of money, primarily by being a staff representative for Gypsies who individually were poor but collectively were very rich and in constant need of legal counsel, specifically criminal defense, a little bit of civil rights stuff, you get the picture.

Steve was sophisticated beyond anything that I certainly had ever met. But he was, in the point of fact, more sophisticated than anything Tom Mayer, from Summit New

Jersey, had ever encountered. Tom had traveled around the world and had some New Orleans but this didn't match up to any of Tom's stuff. Steve was very very smitten by Tom and subsequently sophomore year become Tom and Gregson's roommate. There was another roommate by the name of Gordon Taylor. Gordy subsequently became a Harvard PHD in English and the last time I heard of him he was at the University of Tulsa. Gordy made a masterful career. He was basically a nice guy from Pasadena, California. But he didn't carry the flair that Tom and Gregson carried.

Freshman Conflicts

So Freshman year, Tom was definitely in the closet homosexual as I explained to you. I suspected him to be homosexual when, with what passed for teenage wit, I accused him of being queer, a casual insult which he asked me to take back and I most certainly did. But it still caused some thoughts in the back of my head. Now, mind you, I had never met anybody personally to be homosexual, except for a couple of sad fellows in Thomasville, Ga., one of whom ran the flower shop, the other of whom ran the clothing store, and knew about them. But those were effeminate swishers with lisps and those were queers; I didn't know what queering was really until I was about a junior in high school and queerdome meant something awful but I didn't know what it meant. You could queer somebody and that meant they were queer. We're talking the dark ages here. Yea, I told you about the troubled young genius who made a pass at Tom and Tom threw him down a flight of stairs. Tom was protecting his homosexuality deep in the closet. Once caught Tom preying over beads at three in the morning.

Tom was writing a poem Freshman year. I think he finished it some time before he died. I've read them. I think they are extremely good. He never published them. Danny promised to send me the stuff and I was going to try to get it published in the *Sewanee Review*.

I went with Tom on a couple of occasions to New Jersey, met the family. One time

Tom's father, Earnst, was feeling very very cordial towards Tom and laughing and teasing with German reasoning. Tom's father had had a couple of martini' and was drinking and laughed and with immense friendliness leaned over and gave Tom a love pat with a formalized slap on the face which actually swung Tom's head back and left finger mark's on it. I could see the anger kindle in Tom's face but it was all laughter. It was a love-pat, a funny kind of love pat, a funny kind of Prussian culture.

Themes Tom would address the rest of Tom's life would unfold that freshman year: temper about homosexuality, violence associated with homosexuality, conflicts of faith with the rosary beads, an attempt to grasp the elusive with poetry, and militaristic father who in moments of love would slap his son on the head. The son's rejection of the father and the father's ways would not be smooth or linear.

Tom and I would sit up long nights talking. Tom was immensely interested in theater and got me interested in it, not enough to act in it or participate in it at the time but enough to follow Tom's career with it. Tom was over at the Harvard drama club really wasting a lot of time with it but of course making really super good grades. Where Tom was going in his night life I didn't know. Of course, you and I both know what he was doing now but I didn't know that then.

I had enough problems of my own then. To start it off with I thought I was going crazy and I really did think I was going crazy. It was a sexual neurosis stemming out of a repressed family background and I sort of revolved around my Dad prohibiting me from masturbating, saying he would sent me off to some sort of a Siberia if I persisted in this disgusting habit.

Overlapping themes of Eros, death, and prohibition run throughout the narrative. Freud's Rat Man would end up having some of the same problems our narrator had with masturbation.

Rat Man's father, Freud (1909/55:263) writes, "had forbidden it, using as a threat the

phrase 'it would be the death of you' and perhaps also threatening to cut off his penis." Masturbation was an act of free will, no different than a creative thought. Freud continues, "This would account for his masturbating in connection with the release from the curse, for the commands and prohibitions in his unconscious and for the threat of death which was not thrown back onto his father." The break with the father and his advises & controls would not be easy for Rat Man. Freud notes, "he really believed that you die if you masturbate." Masturbation with its associations with death and castration accompanied exercise of autonomous thought. "The idea of his penis penis being cut off had tormented him to an extraordinary degree, and this had happened while he was in the thick of studying. The only reason he could of was that at the time he was suffering from the desire to masturbate" (264). Rat Man succumb to his fate as soldier during the first World War. Jack, ever cognizant of this, found his own coping mechanisms:

But I was going off, by myself, with enormous anxieties, getting drunk. I woke up shrieking one night, scared the hell out of Tom and John. But, nevertheless, as I try to remember Freshman year its kind of what I remember. Nothing too much, nothing too terribly exciting.

Sophomore Year

Tom went off to room with Engelsing and Davis and Taylor. I was asked to room with a Serge McCaan was a wrestler and an extremely Hainisport (he was an animal). He was an animal. But he asked me and I had trouble turning people down who asked me for things. This was one of the more severe mistakes I made while I was at Harvard. I came back the next year. Tom came over to my room to talk, I went over to Tom's room to talk a lot. Tom and his friends were a far more sophisticated crowd than the animals I was rooming with.

Beat Days

It didn't make too much difference because I was going through a period in which I was going to see a shrink. Six sessions was all we were allowed or else we would have to pay for more, \$25 a session and that was certainly out of the question and I certainly couldn't ask daddy to do it. But in the six sessions, why, he pretty well initiated the sexual anxiety by pointing out that the anxiety stemmed directly from Dad's me in other ways. It was a violent hang up and has, of course left scars to the present day.

But I paid an awful high price to go to Harvard. I was a reasonably intelligent guy. At the social totem pole at padlock prep where the faculty was in the habit of giving me mediocre grades because I wasn't socially respectable enough had different ideas from the third. Everyone was shocked when I got into Harvard and Yale. There I was working with a toxic social situation, a toxic academic situation, dyslexia. Imagine what sort of shape you would have been in if you had put in the sort of effort necessary to get into Harvard. I don't think Harvard was worth it to me or anybody else to get through that. That's why I didn't put you through that sort of pressure. Its better to grow up psychically whole and your own man.

I was going through terrible troubles. I hadn't had a high school career as such and my social life with the guys or the girls. I hadn't had time to actually grow intellectually for that matter except to become awful good at the books that I had to study at Episcopal. So I was busy doing that, trying to figure out what was going on, the same sort of stuff you are going through now, except, by god, if you worked your ass off to go to Harvard, and worked your ass off so you could get into a profession where you worked your ass off so you could send your kids to preparatory school and to go to Harvard and go to professional school so they could go to preparatory school and go to Harvard and to professional school so they could work their asses off. A world without end. That was not what life was about. Something in me knew it.

So I was going off to found the only Bohemian House around Harvard Square.

The guys there knew and liked me, I knew and liked them. I belonged to a club, the Iroquois Club, it was the first social acceptance that I had had for years. So I joined there and I'd go and I'd go in my tuxedo that I wore every two years, that's often I wore it. I wore my tuxedo to formal dinners and which always ended up at drinking parties, after the drinking parties I'd go on over to the bohemian setting and listen to folks play the banjo, the ten string banjo. It was the folk instrument of choice in those days. Of course, Leadbelly didn't play the banjo which hurt it but otherwise it was OK. The folkies were very big. I was spending a of time getting drunk at the club and hanging out in Bohemia. Not studying, fuck that shit, I had a lot more important things to do than study. I had to find out who I was, something that ten years ago I'd swear I was still trying to do. But I'd swear I kind of know who I am these days which is not a bad place to be. It probably signals the approaching end of analysis.

I didn't mention that when I came back for Sophomore year in college, I came back in an old Studebaker and Tom and I went on a number of outings in the old Studabaker. Went into New York city and hung around in Greenwich Village a little bit. Drove up to Bennington, VA., had a hell of a time with the girls up there. Basically the external scene with Tom was pretty much college sort of stuff, uneventful. What was eventful was going on in our minds. Tom was becoming more deeply involved with drama, more and more serious about trying to understand what reality was. I was going through polecat hell because I was still utterly under the control of the old man. He had decided the proper major for me was the history of science because that would be the best degree I could have to go and take over the family fertilizer business because the families advanced by pyramiding over the work of previous generations. Not a lot of god damned pyramiding he did in his own life except using his own daddy's money to go and buy himself a house and an office and get through medical school. But I, I was on a pyramid, nothing except a bunch of bullshit and I was going through serious efforts to try to resist this and resisting it nicely by getting drunk and staying up too late at the club playing bridge, learning what life

was all about, going over and listening to my friend play the banjo, longing for some girl to beckon me as a sexual partner, so forth and so on.

By spring semester, and this is important for Tom, Sophomore year I'd had it, furthermore I was sure I wasn't conceivably going to be able to pass my courses, all of which were just off the wall boring to me. Life like this couldn't continue to go on so I went with Tom to Greenwich Village one more time, went to a party one more time, went to a party and realized they are all fakes. I went back and spent the evening with Jane Whitely. At any rate, I went home, faced the old man and headed for San Francisco. A light jacket, actually it was an army fatigue jacket without a liner, a blanket roll, a knapsack, and \$12 in the hip pocket. The story of my trip to San Francisco is a for another one.

I was gone and did not return to Harvard until second semester of 57?, 58?, spring semester 1959, what would have been my spring semester my junior year but I had been gone a year. Well I got back, I found out that Tom had pulled the same stunt. He had been much under the influence of the "on the road scene." He was far more knowledgeable about the beat generation than I was. Hell, all I knew was that Allen Ginsberg wrote "Howl" and these sons of bitches hung out in San Francisco.

Knowing Tom, he probably studied all of it. He took right on my heels having prudently finished sophomore year, he took off that summer, went down to Louisiana to do a little working man stuff. He got a job as an oil field roust about from the LaBeare family who, of course owned the god damned stuff, Tom didn't like manual labor too much, didn't get along too well with the common men, he romanticized them but that was as far as that went.

Any rate, Tom took off for parts unknown. Tom's parents contacted my parents under the influence that we were in cahoots. "Did I know where Tom had gone, no I didn't." The one thing I had done when I faded was not keep my parents informed as to where I was. I was not in communication with them. Tom was not in communication with his parents. The difference was that Tom got out to Los Angeles where he had adventures.

I arrived, finally, in San Francisco. Basically, Tom was unable to find work. Finding work was hard all right But not as hard as that. At any rate Tom lived for a while as a hooker in Los Angeles, a pretty demeaning existence and just holding body and soul together until finally he contacted his parents.

They sent him ticket money to come home and finally he returned to Harvard. You could take a year's leave of absence just for asking for it and return without any questions asked. That was an encouraged sort of thing. So I arrived back at Harvard in the spring of 1959. Tom had been there a little while but he was also a little behind in his course work, a semester behind, I was a year behind.

Growing Up Gay Before Stonewall

But Tom had come out of the closet and the expense of hooking had taught him the truisms of that. But he fell in love with Brian Holiday, about whom you know. He was an old CIA type over at Janis films. You've seen Janis films surely? The Bergman films were all Janis Films. *Knife in the Water* was a Janis film. All the foreign films that were being made in the fifties were all Janis Films. Now, if you are a head guy in a film importing company that is importing hits and you know people all over Europe that are making films and are making deals with them and bringing them to the United States you can be in any capital in Europe on legit business and he was CIA, serious CIA. In other words CIA funded Janis films. He put the make on me. Uninterested. and Mom put the make on him. To be acquainted slightly with Brian was to be immediately engaged in a sexual underground. It was just what Brian did. That was all he was sexual underworld. But any rate Tom became a plaything of Brian. He really thought the world of Brian for several years. They were friends for the rest of Tom's life. But afterward, Brian went to Paris.

(clapping hands together) At any rate, you've got enough stories for tonight.

He was the biggest homosexual in Boston which was a big homosexual town.. He had orgies at his place, had a rogue gallery of boys, he loved boys all right. Wonderful

photographs of all the little boys who he had laid at one time or another. There was a fair amount of stuff Brian had to give Tom; Tom was wild about the theater. Holiday knew everybody in the theater and on and on. "there, there my dear" terms with Soen McKinna, with Paul Scofield. At any rate, he introduced Tom to the Cambridge festival which is a episode about as important as the Provincetown players but its a chapter in the history of American drama. Tom got involved with the Cambridge drama festival and knew all the names of all the big league people, all the directors and all the playwrights, all you have to have done is hammered nails on the set to be on a first name terms with, name drop like crazy and oh my so and so was a long lost friend to impress your cousins from the sticks when they go behind the scenes. Theater people's tight little hierarchy closes to impress the rubes. Somebody you might have met casually as a member of a crew at a theatrical production is greeted like a long lost friend when backstage with the cousins from the sticks.

And Tom was into all that shit. And Brian was introducing him to the elite in the homosexual underworld. So Tom got to be a bit of an outlaw. Being out of the closet, for openers was fairly wild and bearing in 1959, I mean wild and bearing. And I had achieved a new plateau in my own level of sophistication. I actually knew and was friends with a homosexual but I had to clarify this and make sure it was regularized. So, I immediately sought out Tom and went off to have beers at Cronan's and told him I knew about his being out of the closet and that was all right, I would still continue to be his friend and I would not ostracize him from that. I thought I was being homericly big and sophisticated and Tom looked at me with a condescending grim and said: "Jack, I don't want to hurt your feelings but frankly you are not my type." I think that it was with, "Frankly you are not my type," that an ordinary old college friendship tightened into a bond which lasted a lifetime. As you know in a subsequent period of my life I actively came onto Tom and Tom definatley played the femm of any homosexual role and I was anxious to experiment with this so I put the make on him in a hard sort of way but it was a disaster. That's where I

learned not only that I was not Tom's type but Tom was not my type. But at any rate, we were real tight there that spring semester 1959.

Adventures at Kellers

Hesse described a few of the integral components which would accompany the search for meaning among the generation of 1918.

Alternate interpretations of culture would be necessary. "These are the signs of mental life of our times: a weakening of received systems, a wild searching for new interpretations of human life, a flourishing of popular sects, prophets, communities, and a blossoming of the most fantastic superstitions." Following a life long predisposition for masochism, Tom's search would take him into the deepest realms of New York's early 1950's S & M underground.

When I was gone. He got to hanging out with Slobin McKinna and the Jose Contero. Those are big Broadway names. Anyway, so there was Brian Holiday and then there was a Danny who was a homosexual lover of his in New York because Tom got into the S& M scene, some of it historic. Ah.. Kellers was the first rather black and blue, beat you up leather bar that was notorious in New York. They had boyish fun and games at Kellers. You know, string people up and fist them while you are feeding them poppers. This is the sort of thing that is just dead common now but was sort of wild and woolly back in 1959.

So Tom was involved with that and he was involved with a bartender named Danny. Danny was the son of a military colonel. He was a charming fellow. Liked to be up and stuff.

How did these guys dress and stuff? How were they looking?

Just standard uniform, just standard uniform, blue jeans and sweaters.

What about shoes?

I think if you were serious about shoes you wore jack boots, leather motorcycle boots.

But nothing special. Ah you did not in the leather scene wear sneakers. The pastel oxford cloth shirts, neat chino trousers and tennis shoes white tennis shoes were the costume of the pumpernickell pumps.

The Jeffry Boys, that's what they call them now.

The Pumpernickel Pumps were people who used to go down to Keller's. When the Pumpernickel Pumps showed up why it was open season. The idea was to take one home and genuinely brutalize him so badly that he never did that again, so they never showed up again. They wanted to emphasize on the Pumpernickel Pumps that this was rougher trade than they were prepared to deal in. There were occasional pumpernickel pumps who were so good at it that they frightened leather guys because they would abuse them so terribly and they would keep asking for more as a source of a macho thing, a power game that they would keep asking are you prepared to kill this person cause he's ready to be killed. So he was frightening.

There was one guy who came to Boston from New York and announced that he was the worst M in New York and started his stuff and some of the guys took him back to south Boston and strung him up and I think among the things they did to him was sliced him open with razors and put in gun powder and let it go. But he warped himself in a sheet and fled out of a window and he wasn't as tough as they were but they got him to the hospital and he had to be surgically castrated he was so destroyed and the guys were wanted by the law. So that's a dangerous M.

He had to be castrated?

Surgically, because his genitalia was just shreds. There was no repairing them. So this scene could be terrible...

Risk and gay life would take many turns. Eric Rofes (1996:71) writes, "Certainly pre-stonewall gay life had its dangers: electroshock, mental hospitals, suicide, scandal.... Bars, discos, and sex clubs were located in high-crime neighborhoods and were often sites

of queerbashings, muggings, and murders." Eros as an expression of freewill was fraught with uncertainty. Bronski (1988: 138) writes, "For many, the connections between death and being gay are very clear. If you were "obvious," if you were "known," if you were seen leaving a gay bar, you could be beaten and killed. Death, as it were, came with the territory."

Death and eros somehow intermingled. "I think that the kind of pleasure I would consider as the real pleasure would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive..." Michel Foucault would confess in an Advocate interview a generation later, only months before his death in 1984. He would later describe the appeal of S/M, the consensual form of sado - masochistic eroticism which existed in the San Francisco baths, as a "limbo of non identity." In other words, the S/M could serve as a route to a loss of self.... (Miller, 1993: 26-9).

Experimentation would take many forms. S/M, zen, and theater all served as routs into inquiry about the nature of reality. As the sixties churned into gear, Tom would grow fascinated with the concept of zen - the loss of self to the greater universal consciousness. That was all fine and good, except for Tom, the details proved always remained a step out of reach. Application and its implications seemed to be a point which eluded him:

Theory and Reality

Tom had not quite gotten the difference between theory and reality out of his head from having worked with the common laborer down in Louisiana. He still romanticized the whole idea. He romanticized the tools. He and Jim Brested bought an old Indian, not in working order. So they dismantled it. They found themselves without ability to find all the places for all the parts to even put it back together again, much less repair it. That was a metaphysical exorcise in itself, that was motorcycle maintenance carried to the ridiculous. But they were considering it sublime. I understand the impulse of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance to the Intellectual. Take this wonderful bike, took apart, become a

part of it. Life with it. Understand it. Maintain it. Take it apart and put it back together again. Kill yourself on it. The Indian is a major powerful, incredibly powerful bike. It was a killer. Its a good thing they never were able to get it to work. At any rate, it was also a part of the thing about the tooools (with a long cool voice), the metaphysics of tooools.

Tom decided to take a class in mechanical drawing and he nearly flunked out of school. That class was the biggest torment that Tom had ever encountered in his entire life. It was the albatross. It was the thing that made him sleep all morning long, every morning. You know, mornings when he had to go to mechanical drawing, mornings when he just thought he had to go to mechanical drawing. It just hung over his head and all the wrest of his courses went to hell and Tom really took to hanging out with the Cambridge drama festival to the point where he just about literally, no kidding, by god flunked out of school, flunked out of school. You can't come back you flunked out. Leave involuntarily. And his parents came down and they were pretty interventionist. They got him a senior tutor at Kirkland House where he was and I'll tell you what they went round and round and round and they scarred the bejesus out of Tom. I think probably what they told him was that they were going to cut his wallet off if he flunked out and he was going to go to have to work for sure. Without anybody he couldn't put his knees under the table which is one of the only intelligent things I've ever heard of the Mayers doing with Tom. And there would be no tickets or calling him home again. So Tom, in pure absolute desperation, dropped the mechanical drawing course and went back and with his absolute brilliant best with the rest of them and he stayed in school.

A Golden Period

Now I, my year away hadn't done me nearly all the good that needed to be done. After a lost weekend that lasted the entire semester, I succeeded in flunking out of school for real. The moosehead episode didn't help matters at all. Well then I went off to join the army, got commissioned out of officer's candidate school after a couple of years and spent a

couple of years as a lieutenant. I went from Ft. Jackson to Ft. Cill to Ft. Benning.

Everything I could do didn't get me over seas. But it was in Benning at Columbus that I met your mother and we got married after I left the army and went back up to Harvard. I had drummed up one and a half years credit and some summer school and had some heavy make up for me to do in order to get through with Harvard. Dorothy went up with me and she found a job teaching in Beverly, Mass., ironic name, and we moved into a wonderful little New England salt and pepper they called it. It was a four rooms downstairs and four rooms identical upstairs - kitchen, dining room, living room and what we called the Go to Hell Room. Upstairs we had two guest rooms, a study room and a bedroom. There was way more room than we needed. And it was just an idyllic life.

I was back at school. It was past Christmas, it had to have been. I was walking in six inches of snow, going to class and I heard this howl: "Jack Shepard!!!" Damned if it wasn't Tom, a vision out of my past. I hadn't seen Tom in four years. I've never been so glad to see anybody in my life. I guess I didn't realize it then but maybe it was when (in a mumble) I realized how much I loved the bastard. We blew off classes and went to a coffee shop all morning long and we visited.

It seemed Tom had gone to preflight school after graduation from Harvard. Preflight was the navy's version of officers candidate school. And he'd gone through his six months of officers candidate school and tried to become a jet fighter pilot and he took basic training. I think he won his wings. He learned how to fly a piston engined trainer plane. But when he got into a jet body aircraft (laughing) Tom was no good with tools, ever!!! He just couldn't make the son of a bitch do right. There is low tolerance, low forgiveness in a jet body aircraft. Any rate Tom either quit or flunked out or everybody, with a sigh of relief (laughing), agreed that he wasn't really made out to be a carrier pilot and what he did was he by some or coup found out there was an opening on the staff of the naval war in Man Bean's arms war room in Washington D.C. in the pentagon. He mixed in the room with the big board that you saw in "Dr. Strangelove" and Tom says that's exactly

the way it looks, that is the circle they sit around. He was one of the flunkies staffing all those generals, admirals and presidents and what not. He was working on the staff of some admiral.

But he had class Q clearance, the highest possible clearance. The guys an out of the closet homosexual except he hadn't been homosexual in the navy because you couldn't be homosexual in the navy. It wasn't "don't look don't tell," they made a serious effort to find out about you. But, Navy intelligence had talked to Jose Toyntero, one of the more notorious homosexuals on Broadway, a Broadway director, probably still in business to this day. He's a grand old man, a Eugene O'Neil specialist and he gave that guy as a reference and he gave Brain Holiday, another notorious homosexual, as a reference and navy intelligence never quite got it. And they gave him his clearance. Now heres a guy who can be sent to prison, cause they had the ability to do that in the military in those days. The Uniform Code of Military Justice provided for jail for a homosexual in the military. But they could throw you in prison. They had created a blackmail system that wouldn't quit. They really were security risks given the way they were treated if they were caught. So Tom had made up his mind that if anybody had ever tried to blackmail him why he'd a just turn himself in if he ever got caught. Of course, it never worked out that way but at any rate he (laughing) got caught. He got caught and they let him go with sexual state discharge, a general state discharge under circumstances other than honorable. I didn't know about this until, oh, maybe a year. But you know, it eventually came out, what had happened to Tom in the Navy. No question that he was sure screwing sailors from Northfolk Virginia or getting screwed.

So there he was back at Harvard. How he'd gotten back in was that he'd gone and been busted some time in July or August. He just went back to the English Department and said: "YOU'VE GOT TO GET ME BACK IN!!!!" And they let him in. As far as Tom's academic life was concerned, he'd applied to two schools: Harvard under graduate school and he made application way after everybody else had been accepted to Harvard

graduate school. And because he was such a fucking genius why they were glad to have him. That was his status when I saw him again, at graduate school English Ph.D. program.

After we finished talking again, why it was on a Friday, we went out, got Tom to spend the weekend at the house in Beverly. Shit, we had two guest bedrooms. Take your pick. And Tom got aged gouda and bought a cheese mouse, this little mouse with a pointed tale. Tom picked out two pieces of cheese he got, took it out (is this previous sentence right) and I had reached Tom finally. Dorothy and I had been married finally, what, six months. But Tom met Dorothy. And Tom there on until he died it was Jack and Dorothy and Tom.

We had a nice time that evening. The next morning I got up and went to bed. The next morning I came down and Tom was in the kitchen visiting with Dorothy and that connection had been made.

And from there on out: Dorothy, Tom and Me. And now they are both gone, my two dearest friends.

Dad would tell this story over and over. Mom and Dad had divorced only five years prior to the rendering of this story. As it turns out. He would explain, "my love for her now lives on a quieter place."

The memories existing here carried images of perhaps the best time in his life. Five years after this reunion, Mom, Dad, Tom, and another friend would take the summer off to travel. They journeyed in a LAN drover overland from London, (had the auto shipped to Paris) through Europe, Berlin, through Afghanistan, through the Kaiber Pass, to India, and Anchor Watt. This was the boast. One night during interviews, Dad would go on to read from a burgundy and black, hard back legal journal he owned which Tom had carried through the entire trip. He read:

Log - Summer 1965 -
30 Tuesday - 7:25 on board PA72 - Its astounding the way my attention flickers - for a few moments I am actually aware of what's about to happen,

of my obligation to record it all - the last bath, the last martini at what time I left Summit - and yet how much of all of this I neglect - I remember the time I left Summer better than I remember the time I left the Coop garage - the mind too busy with habit I guess, to note what is new and significant - or perhaps (perhaps more accurate too) significance is too irrelevant to the daily operation of the mind-----.....

as I began to say - how long its been (7:43 moving) (to Asia mainor) - I've wanted for so long to record the prologue to all of this trip - the day last June in Cronin's when I told Jack; I'll go if you let me or will have me - I'll beg, borrow or steal the money if necessary- but I will go -

"I can't read any more," Dad confessed as he broke down and cried, the only time during otherwise joyful interviews. I read further. The text has the same effect on me:

To: 7:67 - its begun and all I can do is cry - away from the west, from the setting sun & all that it means: movement, progression, gradies ad mortem - back instead, back to the rising sun to bath in & origin - renounce the struggle & search - retreat instead to the condition of stillness - is this the direction of what is meant by OM?...

Febuary 27, 1996, Hyde Park - Postscript

Years later, just months after I had moved to Hyde Park and Dad had accepted his calling to run a church in Los Alamidos, Ca., we sat talking. Tom 's name came up in conversation as it frequently would. Dad remembered the journal.

I think he spent the last 25 years looking for that stillness. When I would go down to Manahannes, he would point to the desert and explain, "Haunted lands." He was always trying to show me his Texas. I could never see it. I would go down to Monahannes a lot.

June 4, 1997

I could see it, as I sit here listening to "Mr. Bo jangles" from the Jerry Jeff Walker greatest hits album Tom gave me for my 16th birthday, some eleven years ago, I can see his Texas. "Lawrence of Arabia" had been his favorite movie. "The desert was the star," he once told me. He was kicked out of Harvard in 1969 - finally earning his Ph.D. three years later. The only teaching assignment he ever got was at Texas A & I. After teaching

and loving it for five years, they dropped him when he refused to publish. The desert was always the hero. Texas' deserts became his Arabia; they brought him a little closer to that stillness which had eluded him.

Through still he could begin to find the dissociation of consciousness which he craved through the S/M theater of pain. Through sexuality, he came a little closer to renouncing the self to fate. Michel Foucault would explain, "the goal of my sexual licentiousness" was "a geometric incandescence," Miller (1993:89) would define as, among other things, the coinciding point of life and death, being and nothingness... Incandescence is one of the only ways I know to begin think about the pieces of a man who obsessed with sexuality, being in time, theater, zen, stillness, and the desert.

I'll never forget Tom. It was Tom who brought a dignity to not knowing.... a dignity to going to see two movies in a row.....

In the End

W.W.I introduced moral relativity to this century. Zuckmayer concludes: "We are the ones whose lives began with the knowledge of the ultimate and greatest thing of earthly existence - of the most terrible, the mortal abandonment of man, and the highest, comradeship." Within this comradeship, eros and human connection, replaced connection with larger meaning, with faith. As such, the AIDS era - which combined realization of "the mortal abandonment of man, and the highest, comradeship." With the compulsive yearning for connection, for this "comradeship," sex took a profound role. We played out the poor modeling we learned through growing up. As Melanie Klein describes in her essay, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic Depressive States," a desire to move farther away from the "persecutors," to reject the father, past through the ego's instinct to, "identify itself more fully with good objects." Klein describes the process:

As a child (or an adult) identifies himself more fully with a good object, the

libidinal urges increase; he develops a greedy love and desire to devour this object and the mechanism of introject is reinforced. Besides, he finds himself constantly impelled to repeat the incorporation of a good object, partly because he dreads that he has forfeited it by his cannibalism....

In a reactionary way, many of us played out our insatiable appetites to devour "the good objects," sexual and otherwise, throughout this century. Klein notes that, "this introjection miscarries and the consequence is illness." The social/psychological illness of the era, bulimia, HIV, rape, and manic depression, were not far behind.

This moral abandonment played out countless forms during the AIDS era. Tom was forced to get medication from a veterinarian. Degradation became common for the man. Reagan didn't utter the word AIDS for six years and people's lives crumbled, instead men and women within American cities, responded creating a safety net for the ill within their communities (Shepard, 1997). Both the lives of those on the front and those who were left to die of a disease whose government refused to address without a cure, were abandoned by their government. Tom died during this era.

Hesse identified both the necessity and the risks of the quest for meaning within the yearning of our time, "Even if they are all condemned to failure, they nonetheless remain serious concerns with supreme goals, should none of all of them survive our time, they fulfill an essential function of our time, they fulfill an essential function while they live." Tom did not survive. His search for meaning took him from Berlin to Anchorwat back to Cambridge through eros, Manhattan, Monahannes, Dallas, Lubbock and personal descimation. In knowing him I cannot but feel that he did fulfill an function of our time.

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* I am indebted to Borden (1992) and Spence (1982) for clarifying this distinction. Barthes' (1978) understanding of subjectivity challenges notions of "truth" derived from the Decartes as self evident, rational and coherent to all. Werner Heisenberg, the father of quantum mechanics, posities that the observing instrument alters the reality of the observed object. Truth is in the eye of the interpreter. We are all stories.

PAGE

PAGE 1