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A Century of Enthusiasm

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A CENTURY OF ENTHUSIASM

A Thesis Presented

by

CARSON HARRINGTON CISTULLI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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September 2007

English Creative Writing

A CENTURY OF ENTHUSIASM

A Thesis Presented

by

CARSON HARRINGTON CISTULLI

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ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF

People of the world, allow me to introduce myself: my name is Carson Harrington Cistulli, ambassador to crunk in the Western Hemisphere. My name is Carson Fitzgerald Cistulli, original settler of every woman's private parts. Pay attention: I am Carson Meriwether Cistulli, the one who can see his victims from over a paragraph away. Who am I? Perhaps you know me: Carson Tarantella Cistulli, after whom European dances are named. Carson Disgusting Placenta Cistulli, who has sired children on seven continents and also space. Carson Ralph Waldo Cistulli, who plays the same note on many different instruments. Don't look me in the eye: who knows what'll happen? Don't tread on my feet: it'll hurt if you do. I am Carson Tireless Worker Cistulli, inventor of Human Dignity. Carson Living Wage Cistulli, who has thread his tongue through the eye of this needle.

PART ONE

ASSORTED FICTIONS

I've met a philosopher, a banker, a painter, and a lawyer, but I've never met a cobbler. No, wait, I actually did meet one—about three years ago now, I guess. Well, let me rephrase, then: I've never met a very memorable cobbler.

* * *

People, sometimes they're not so good. They cheat, they lie, I'll tell you what. I knew a guy who cheated and lied so bad, he did it to his own self. But after, I thought: when we cheat and lie others, we *always* do it to our self as well. Put it in a book!

* * *

There is a man out there who doesn't talk to people all day. He *prefers* it, he says. Still, even though he does that, his clocks run just as fast, don't they?

Many people say, “Who's my doppelganger?” when maybe they should ask, “Whose doppelganger am I?” To any reader who doesn't agree: you're the very target of my wicked barbs.

* * *

The scene here is a tennis tournament's final match. The player serving has match point in his favor. So this player, he serves it, and his opponent returns; he hits a baseline stroke, and the opponent gets it back; he's up at net, volleying, but the opponent is equal to the challenge. Things go like this for what seems an hour...Only, it wasn't an hour. In fact, it was only about forty-five seconds.

Such is the perception vs. reality tension.

* * *

This morning I woke up for no reason. But then I thought, Well, what *would* be a good reason? And then I thought, Yeah, that's a good point. Interestingly, I *said* nothing during the whole episode. A fact which, I'm sure, lends credibility to my position.

During Little League, the coaches always told us to “look alive.” “How else *can* we look?” I asked one time. So it was, on my behalf, a stroke of cleverness and bravery.

Remarkably, this was some ten years before my first drink.

* * *

Some people see a glass as half full or empty: okay, fine. But what about a mirror, hm? It's either *completely* full or empty, depending on how you think. In conclusion, I suggest it become the new litmus test for optimism.

* * *

A man went into his garden at sunset, per his usual routine. While seated there, a bee stung him on the leg, right around the calf area. “Fugall,” he said. “I won't tolerate this behavior on my property.” To which the bee replied: “Ever hear of a little thing called the proletariat?”

A familiar practice is to add the words “in bed” to a fortune cookie's sentiment. More often than not, the result is sure to please. A lesser-known alternative is to add “while wasting your life in grad school” to the end. The result here, while less comic, provides no less in the way of a certain and perpetual intrigue.

* * *

Ask them, and many people will say that I'm a perfectly reasonable young man; meanwhile, to my girlfriend's family, I'm a neurotic, slick-talking New Englander. Pardon my autobiographical liberties, but I *had* to say it.

* * *

A parable this time.

Once there was writer of great talent whose roommate persisted in bothering him.

“That's not even a parable, you know?” said the roommate.

“I'm not finished yet, you ass,” the writer explained.

“Well, it probably won't be that good anyway,” the roommate said and then walked away.

See? Now do you comprehend the gravity of my—I mean *the*—situation?

“Water finds the lowest ground,” or something like that, is a saying for old men to use. “Heavens to Betsy” is for old women. Anyone under sixty utilizing such terminology will be reported to the authorities and punished accordingly. Note that violators who demonstrate “age beyond their years” will receive their due leniency.

* * *

A little girl, it was funny, she thought the saying was “age beyond their *ears*.” So amused was everyone, they never corrected her—a circumstance excusable up to a point. But now this girl is a forty-seven y.o. Professor of Economics at a prestigious university—and still she says the “ears” thing. Now it's less funny and more sad—and all because of what? That's right: this rotten, accursed Zeitgeist.

* * *

I propose a National Army composed entirely of women. Think about it: women on the front lines, women in the pentagon, women manning the guns...

Well, wait, I guess they'd be “womaning” the guns, wouldn't they? So, see, it'd be alot to get used to, but I'm willing to the make the sacrifice for my proud and noble country.

For my next trick, thought the undistinguished writer, I'll deceive the reader with several tepid abstractions.

* * *

Wife Beating doesn't exist anymore; now it's called Domestic Abuse. That's fine, but the trend has caught on elsewhere. For example, we know longer use Judgment; it's been usurped by Literary Theory—a.k.a., the practice of shitting with one's pants on.

* * *

In an argument between two intellectuals, one said, "History is written by the victors." To which the second replied: "Well, I only know of one Victor, personally. His last name's Darensbourg, he's a relief pitcher for the Tigers, and I doubt he's written much besides his name onto different contracts." It was wickedly funny, everyone agreed, and the laughter subsided only at the morning light—for everyone except Victor Martinez, that is, star catcher of the Cleveland Indians and author of a charming three-book history *in re* his native Venezuela.

This bit is for young people, aged 16-25 y.o. Here: when adult-types ask what you'll do for work someday, just go, "venture capital" and then shut up. If they press the matter, affect the accent of some foreign-speaking nation. Now look into the inquisitor's eyes. What do you see? Here's a hint: it's his greatest extent fear.

* * *

What if a misogynist were "a person trained in manipulation of the soft tissues of the body"? Well, Women's Studies would be alot different, for one thing. And I could tell you more, as well, if I hadn't been jarred from my reverie by a pang of hunger.

So it *is* the case: the mind is not independent of the body.

* * *

"Jonathan Safran Foer and the *New York Times Book Review* up in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a gigantic first printing in the baby carriage."

If we were all in 2nd grade, I'd sing this at the top of my lungs. As criticism it'd be truer than most, with the added benefit of a cheerful melody.

People, they're afraid of being second rate, but they oughtn't be. Success brings expectations; expectations, responsibility.

* * *

Last night, I conceived of a book fully-formed. If you want to read it, it's written in my dreams. Look deep into my dreams!

* * *

A quick scene.

A: It's a great restaurant. You get a nice view, comfortable chairs, everything.

B: Yeah, but what about the food?

A: The food?

B: I mean, is it good?

A: Argh! Your bourgeois conceits destroy me!

A point of advice: when you see a small child walking around, pretend he or she's just completely drunk. You'll find the characterization to be appropriate for the child's actions and, as an added bonus, free of charge.

* * *

A man, even at 60 y.o., still bought his pants and shirts a size too big. When asked why, he'd say, "To grow into." The contingency seemed unlikely, even he himself would concede, until you consider what else seems unlikely—like human life, for instance, or the entire discipline called Identity Politics.

* * *

"To make an omelet, you've got to break some eggs," is a saying to which many people seem resigned. In many cases it's true, but not for those with a personal chef, is it? Their eggs are broken for them, in the kitchen, while they reap the benefits. People don't want to hear that, though. They want their truths so easy to digest.

And so to those people, I pronounce: You have lost the battle and also the war.

Let's consider the etymology of *fiction* for a minute. If I'm not mistaken, it comes to us from the Latin verb *Facio, -ere*, meaning "to make or do." *Fiction*, then, would be "that which is made" or "made up"—a simple and rather all-encompassing notion, you'd agree. And yet some—perhaps by way of bookstores or writing programs or whatever—they've reduced the word to describe only "that genre of writing that follows rhetorical laws A, B, and C" where A, B, and C equal, you know, rather tepid and narrowly defined conceptions of plot, character development, etc. And while that's terrible enough, worse yet is this: they don't regard these developments as *completely arbitrary and relative*.

* * *

I won't support the candidate who plans to enforce a national bedtime, nor the one calling for Gerard Manley Hopkins in our schools, nor the one for whom jazz dance has special meaning, nor the one who worships the God of Business Sculpture .

Unfortunately, the current president's no good either: he just delivered a speech in support of the sacrifice bunt and wants to arm our police force with nothing but a quick-acting poison. It's enough to make anyone sentimental as regards our forefathers: men who, with little fanfare, and even less intelligence, French-kissed their way to a country called America.

* * *

On May 3rd, 1993, Pierre Boulez asked the question, "Does the *Zeitgeist* even exist?" You'd call it poetic justice, I guess, if the *Zeitgeist* said the same about Pierre Boulez.

Unfortunately, this won't ever happen: the *Zeitgeist* is an abstract concept and possesses no faculty of speech.

Queer Olympics? They have a Queer Olympics now? I'm kind of amazed. On the other hand, it doesn't really surprise me—I mean, what with the Structuralist Olympics and Post-Colonial Olympics and all.

* * *

Bonjour to that woman's ass, is all I'm saying. So terrific, it needs to be greeted in a foreign language. And let's hear it for another thing, too—like how about foreign people, is what. Their suffering and joy and ways I've found attractive without ever knowing why. But guess what? Now I do know why: because it's *over there*.

* * *

In the Wodehouse stories, either Bertie or Jeeves will sometimes settle down with “an improving book.” What if, instead of “a book that improves its reader,” it meant “a book that improves as it goes along”? Would that be a book to read, do you think? Or to write?

I, for one, can't say. Most likely, it's a case of personal preference—a concept which I hardily defend, but about which I have little to say.

Here's a moment from our childhoods, right? The teacher says, "Everyone turn to page forty-five," and then a boy near you—almost always named A.J.—he announces proudly, "I turned right to the page!"

Have I characterized the situation accurately, do you think? Have I done my job as the *littérateur*? The opinion is all yours, reader, but don't let the privilege inflate you excessively.

* * *

What some call *boredom*, the educated call *ennui*. The two are basically the same; it's just that *ennui*'s more expensive.

* * *

People always want "to do something" with their lives. Do something? That's fine, I guess. Except here's something for those people not to do: procreate.

My neck has hurt with no reason for almost a month now.
“Hurts with no reason”: is that true of life, do you think?
Well, maybe—if you’re South American, for example, or a
participant in “the New Sincerity.”

* * *

Scene.

A: I never feel upset. But, at the same time, I’m never, you
know, unabashedly joyful, either.

B: Are you complaining? I can’t tell.

A: Complaining? Maybe. Expressing feelings of pain,
dissatisfaction, or resentment? Definitely.

* * *

Often, if a patient feels disconsolate, the cause is attributable
to merely a lack of sleep. Conversely, if one feels fatigued,
he might be suffering from a serious, yet undetected,
emotional crisis.

Wodehouse describes his style as “a musical comedy without music.” Old Dirty Bastard was so-called because there’s “no father to his style.” Meanwhile, Russian filmmaker Eisenstein practiced the art of dramatic juxtapositions, or what he called “Intellectual Montage.”

A notice to all who are wondering: I reject the works of Sergei Eisenstein!

* * *

Just because a girl says “Hi Sheena” into her phone, do I really think that’s who’s on the other side? The answer’s *no*, and I’ll tell you why: Sheena’s only the 80th most popular girl’s name, while, for example, Amber’s 20th and Sarah’s 5th. Most probably, that other girl’s name is Jennifer, and Sheena’s just a funny nickname or something.

* * *

Freedom is a tough word to describe. Where does one begin? I can’t say for sure myself, but I might start with, “The first letter’s *f* and it rhymes with a Boston suburb.”

PART TWO

from THE UNCOLLECTED FLIS

The poem here seems to have been written in the Spring of 2006 by Flis, although the validity of the authorship is considered uncertain by some scholars. Harold Bloom, for example, mistook the below for an *aperitif* and tried to eat it, until it was removed from his possession by force. Marjorie Perloff said it was fine, but the silence in it was much louder than the silence of John Cage's work. Ron Silliman, on his popular blog, said the usage of "smear the queer" in it was distinct to the later Flis but not this era. This criticism holds little water, however, as the phrase "smear the queer" appears in no version of the poem to date—a point by which Silliman seems vigorously unfazed.

Ultimately, critics observe that, if the poem is not authentic Flis, it at least represents a faithful—if not slightly hidebound—impersonation. As to the identity of a potential impersonator, it's hard to say, except to note that Flis's work was already exceedingly popular on most of the East Coast and certain, more intellectual neighborhoods of Calgary, now home to the Flisian Party, who hold a majority in the Canadian legislature.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear My Honeys at the Old Folks,
I have misplaced my Christian alarm
which I blow whenever Pol Pot
harms my soul position. Apologies.
The escalator to my diary has been
in Detroit for weeks now. In the
meantime, I make do with a calculator
on which you can fellate all or
part of a fruit. The weird part is,
no one but my architect is preggy.
Even the lowest tax bracket here have
shares in the Bachelors Degree codpiece.
Finally, some police brutality!
I'm looking out the window as
I write this, onto the Tylenol fields
where we used to smite mailboxes
on Moral Tuesday. I'd cry if ya'll
weren't on my emotional chain gang,
oozing your fantastic philanthropy
into my tantric sex bed sores.
If you need me, I'll be at the mall
all next week, shopping for my
Tonsil Hockey mini skirt.
Give hugs and kisses to the misuses,

if you happen past their shallow graves.
I'll tell Ralph Waldo puberty is hell for you.
He's been designing cupcakes that
don't cry as loud. Amen, eh?
Barely Yours in Coeur D'Alene,
and Barely Legal everywhere, BF.

P.S. I get extra credit if I denounce
apostrophe as a rhetorical device,
but I still have that poem to
a slice of pizza that I like. Any
advice you can give—i.e. "chin
up, mister"—would be great.

Peace Out,

The Flister

MY WOMEN

I like my coffee like I like my women: strong and black.

I like my favorite poets like I like my women: a little disappointing in person.

I like my football like I like my women: European, please.

I like my clothes like I like my women: gently worn.

I like my national monuments like I like my women: beautiful in the distance.

I like my cafes like I like my women: with enough good light inside them.

AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION

I was standing in the middle of Quebec, my horsehair knapsack brushing lustfully up against Monsieur Lasagnamaker, my private uncle on my mother's side. "Too bad we don't have a safe," I said. "Why?" he asked. "Why *not*," I countered poignantly, one of my fingers in his dyke.

The school kids were out by the swimming pool, canvassing on behalf of explicit language. "Man, you can't get sandwiches these days," said Lasagnamaker. "Sand, you can't get manwiches these days," I mocked Lasagnamaker by saying, if I don't say so myself. Speaking of which:

Sally sells seashells by the seashore.
Sally sells seashells by the quiefer.
Sally plays tonsil hockey like a knockout.
Sally rocks condoms like a braceface.
Sally does Bigfoot with her her robot bush.
Sally has a frame like an Argonaut.
Guess Who whips cream with her dinghy.
Sally smacks wimps with her boobs a lot.

I've made one promise to the American people: to get tre dirty with my crock pot. But I can't do it alone. I need your help. And *your* help. And your help, there. And you, in the blue stockingface. And you, in the fragrant mock skin. And you, blowing bubbles for fitness. And you, who dangles his balls on little foamy chins.

I will call my sword "Escalade!"
And my minivan "Impala!"
And my testicles "Siamese!"
And my stock exchange "Camouflage!"

No one in the whole school has boots the color of a jungle gym, but no one has guns with a crooked suffix. "Whaddya think of that, Lasagnamaker?" I chided. "Of what?" "Of the *facts* as I present them?" He paused. "Would it be rude if I suggested you blow me?" Of all the! That was real Elvis Costello of him, if you don't mind me saying, which reminds me to say:

To watch broadcast TV, add a pinch of dill to your wick.
To pummel correctly, have an orgasm in shop class.
To mock a priest, put thistle between your lips.
Got an Mp3? Shove it towards an ashtray.

I like you, readerface. You're not like the others. You've got twenty lips per page, while other have two at most. I think we'll get along for now and break up later—it's always the way. Please tell Sissy I miss her. She didn't show up for my labor collective. That's

cool. Some other day. But seriously, I have to go. The coffee tastes like lampsauce now. They're putting their amps in my lamp a lot. Call your tugboat if you need help. It's better than a kick in the face.

LOVE POEM NOT WITHOUT CONCERNS

I want all of you to be free from worry. An unmarried man worries about how to please the Lord. But a married man has more worries. He must worry about the things of this world, because he wants to please his wife. So he is pulled in two directions.

1 Corinthians 7:32-34

Kali tells me not to joke so much, it has a tendency to undercut something sweet about the poem. I consider what she says with anxiety. Being with a girl, always consider what she says with anxiety. Either she's your best reader or destroys your authentic voice. Either she cries when you cook dinner or cries when you don't.

In his new Cavafy poems, Sean Casey has demonstrated the sort of quiet enthusiasm that adults will love and kids will like-like. He demonstrates that going to bed at ten in an area code of silence has benefits you could write on your arm. Free not to behave like a child, a man behaves like himself, either asleep on his stomach, or considering the etymology of his surname, which means "generalized anxiety disorder" back in the long ago fatherland, his surname, which means "one ml short of a L" back in the long ago, now predominately metric fatherland.

In her poem "Evangelical," Mary Ruefle has a passionate romance with the poet Brad Flis. They both have reservations, though: Mary worries that Brad's haircut will vote Republican next election, while Brad suspects Mary of using the phrase "cultural geography" when he's not around. Oprah Winfrey is powerless to help! She's on PBS, tracing her family tree all the way back to the uncreated light. Meanwhile, "Evangelical" is falling apart. Mary plants wiretaps in Brad's eternal penny loafers. Brad writes Mary up for breaking the city

ordinance on excessive agenda-having.
In the end, neither is able to recall
the grounds for their initial attraction.

"Which'll happen to us, too, if you don't
wash the f-ing dishes!" Kali says,
throwing away my copy of
Stats Stats Yeah! as punishment,
forcing me to confront my own
undisciplined soul, which is punishment itself.
I admit it, I'm a bad guy.
I can't help myself, I acknowledge it.
However, in this poem, it's my intention
to give evidence that I'm not so terrible.
How exactly I'll do that, I'm not sure,
but sitting here for a while
in contemplation of my luminous mystery,
seems probably a good way to begin.

I WAS SO DRUNK

That one night I was so drunk
I could place antlers back onto the deer.

That one night I was so drunk
I mistook a girl's pigtails for the new model of jet propeller.

That one night I was so drunk
I thought the stars were tiny rape whistles.

That one night I was so drunk
I apologized to someone in the middle class.

I was so drunk
I convinced my beard to join the Popular Team.

I was so drunk
I pledged allegiance to a crock pot.

I was so drunk
I joined the frat whose mascot is a syringe.

I was so drunk on love
I renamed my hometown Make Out City.

I was so drunk on politics
I told the governor his assassin's name.

I was so drunk on coffee
I steered my car into the bloodmobile.

I was so drunk on yearbook signing
I fought a guy with thyme on his knuckles.

I was so drunk on fundraising
I took a photo of the congressman's letter grades.

I was so drunk on teaching
I got a tattoo of my students' names.

AUTHENTIC NICARAGUAN TAMALES

Dough

4 cups Welcome Party
2 cups skim Housewife
1½ cups low-sodium Christian Democrat
½ cup mashed Hawk
1 tablespoon Cancer of the Brain
1 tablespoon America's Favorite Food
½ teaspoon Military Revolution

Filling

¼ cup Widespread Panic
½ teaspoon Los Angeles
2 cloves Big Business, minced
½ pound boneless, skinless Leftists cut into 20 strips, ½-inch by 2 inches

Garnishes

2 medium Refugee Women, peeled, and thinly sliced (20 slices)
40 Consecutive Losses
2 Empty Lecterns, thinly sliced (20 slices)
1 Memory, thinly sliced
½ Babykiller, thinly sliced (20 slices)
2 Filthy, Uneducated Governments, thinly sliced (20 slices)
20 People Crippled by Land Mines

TO KALI

Lara in front of me here is wondrous as a bullet's metaphysics. Jessica is advanced parlance. Therese is subtle interpretation. Noel is dances on the occasion of a picnic. After all of them, what is Kali? I don't know, but not like Becca who has jeans of action, nor Beth of the first commandment personality. Franca is like a magnet's poles to me, versus Evangeline, dressed in Noble Prizes. And as for Kali? Okay, I'll tell you. She put snow on the mountain's peak for me and took the Gallup Poll of my imagination. She is both the V-Hold and popular fiction of my life. I write her letters daily, which I'm then prompted to discard. She engineered several corporate mergers until I couldn't resist temptation. And no word she speaks has a true synonym. Kali Coles makes my life magical and I probably want to marry her, except I don't know when yet.

JUSTIN JAMAIL

Justin Jamail was born in Houston TX in 1980, the issue of the god Cash Money and goddess Protectress of Business Travel. There, in Houston, he attended the middling-to-fair private day school Episcopal, then went on to the very much esteemed Columbia University in New York City. It was there, in 1999, that he met Carson Cistulli, and his work went from being like a whore's crotch to what we see today. Justin Jamail is the author of a huge ego, to which he tends daily as if it were any of the more delicate South American flora. In addition, he is known for his periodic ejaculations "I'm great," "I win," and "Mine, mine, mine." He currently attends UMass-Amherst and lives, begrudgingly, in Northampton MA, where he can be found specifically *not* letting his friends use his internet connection.

SEAN CASEY

Sean Casey was born in 1976 to one Sister Mary Margaret of St John the Cross Parish on Holiday St in Lowell MA—which event Sister Mary briefly attributed to a second, less well-advertised Immaculate Conception, before admitting that the young Casey had been sired by Mr. John Casey, a local heating and ventilation specialist. After growing up in nearby Andover MA, Casey attended the somewhat-better-than-middling-but-not-quite-excellent Phillips Academy, after which he attended the lesser Ivy Brown University. However it was not until later, in the Fall of 2004 at UMass-Amherst, that he met the aforementioned Carson Cistulli, who fostered his fledgling imagination into the creative powerhouse it has become. Among his works, he is the co-author, along with nature and nurture, of the psychological conditions Checking Behavior, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and the forthcoming Oh Crap, I've Done Nothing with My Life. He is currently at work establishing Generation XXX, to which he'd like to invite more women—or even one woman. He lives in Southampton MA, if you can call that living.

CHRISTOPHER DeWEESE

Christopher DeWeese was born on the shores of Washington state to a woman impregnated by a dolphin, an event which most people regard as horrible and unfortunate, but which DeWeese describes as “just really beautiful.” He grew up in Port Townsend WA, attended public school—whatever that is—and went on to the-very-completely-middling Oberlin College, where he pursued their twin strengths of Vanity and Sincerity. From there, he did nothing of consequence until the Fall of 2004, when he met and shared an apartment with Carson Cistulli, who, despite his other virtues, was unable to do much with DeWeese’s work, which was mostly a lot of weeping put down in words and then something about pirates. DeWeese is the author of several books of poems, including *Actually*, *Do Cry for Me*, *Argentina* and *Circus Jerk*. He lives in Northampton, MA where is mainly known as the guy who knows Justin.

REVIEW OF COMMENTS RECEIVED
PETER GIZZI'S WORKSHOP, WEEK 2

Brad Flis

*Rating: 6.5

*Comments to the effect that I'm homosexual are understandable but incorrect. Yes, I've had intimate relations with men, but only very effeminate men, and just a very few of them at that. Anyway, Brad should talk. Word has it he will bring *The Starlight Express* to town. I have read it in his horoscope!

Sara Veglahn and Juliette Lee

*Rating: 8.0

*I take them together here because they are married to the same man, that aging but still beautiful Indian (feather, not dot, Indian) who is able to live on both coasts at once, amazingly. Sara's comment that my work will incite riots among the undergrads is appreciated but, I think, overstated. Fisticuffs? Maybe. Heated conversation? Sure. But not riots. Sarah, you're too kind! As for Juliette, I think she's jealous of Sara's new sneakers which light up anytime she feels poetic. Juliette only has the ones that allow her to make glowing comments about Coen brothers' films. Still, I find here works about factory life imaginative and startlingly humane. An X on a scale of Y to Z!

Joe Hunt

*Rating: 2.0

*I couldn't be more happy for the new thing in Joe's life, a combination DVD and VHS player with the special adapter for assessing property values. Still, must he mention it all the time? Some examples from last class: "Carson, this line's almost as good as my new DVD player." And: "You know what this line could really use? How about a DVD player is what." I'm not saying anything, except Joe better watch out at the next MFA Reading-slash-Bar Brawl.

Cynthia Roderick

*Rating: Numbers Don't Do Her Justice

*Cynthia and I have been friends since our tour together of the rich Oklahoman coastline. That was, when?, 1970-something or ca. 1875. She loved Nathaniel Hawthorne with her entire heart; I could be seen sneaking into the bushes with Miss Emily Dickinson. Madame Bovary kept pushing the delete key of my existence. I asked why to Cynthia, who could only reply, "Insert Wisdom Here."

Willie Bordwine

*Rating: 10.0

*When Willie suggested I turn every pronoun into the word "catfish," I have to say I was skeptical; only now have I realized the stroke of genius behind his comment. I'd even go so far as to use the word "virtuoso" if I knew how to spell it. Instead, I'll just say this: "Goddamn Willie Bordwine, you're the offensive lineman of my entire aesthetic."

Tanja Sofia Krupa

*Rating: 5.1

*Tanja's and my love affair lasted for only a minute and neither of us were present for it; still, it has become the standard to which other loves are compared. Perhaps this explains why she's so elusive. Some recent examples: Me: "Nice weather we're having, hm?" Tanja: "No comment." And: Me: "Hey, isn't your birthday coming up soon?" Tanja: "It's impossible to say." As for my poem, she wrote only, "Six pages in length, I see. Very Cistullian." This is why I use all three of her names and in no particular order.

CONSILIATORY ADDRESS TO THOSE NOT LISTED ABOVE

As certain medical professionals have known for some time, and what I will tell you now, is that I suffer from a rare case of narcolepsy that can create a sort of strobe effect on my perception of any given event. All in all beautiful? Yes. Awkward sometimes? That, too. In this case, certain comments from Arisa White, Mark Rosenberg, and Peter Gizzi are absent from my memory, and posterity is all the worse for it. Then again, posterity wasn't all that great before, either.

PART THREE

INTRODUCTION TO ENTHUSIASM

I. A Definition of Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm, derived from the Greek *enthousiasmós*, historically means something like *God inside* or *possessed by God* or *having God within*. Of course, this is not the way we typically use the word. For us, one might be enthusiastic about an idea, or might himself *be* an “enthusiast”—for guns, or movies, or golf, or the outdoors. For us, the enthusiast is one, we might say, who possesses a discerning taste for this or that leisure activity. Of course, this conception is less that sort of classically conceived notion of leisure as contemplative time (such as Giamatti discussed in *Take Time for Paradise*), and more those activities associated with the leisure *industry*. This is not the sort of enthusiasm in which I'm particularly interested.

Furthermore, certain early religious sects have either willfully admitted to, or been accused of having, *enthusiastic* practices—those which pursue a direct relationship with God outside of the authority of the (typically Catholic) church. The so-called Quietists of 17th c. Spain were, and still are, deemed heretical on these grounds. Before them, there was a sect of 4th c. Syrians known by the name Enthusiasts—also heretical. But again, this is not the sort of enthusiasm that I wish to champion—nor could I, I suppose: heresy doesn't really exist anymore. Or, rather, perhaps it exists so abundantly that the Church has stopped pointing it out all the time.

The sort of enthusiasm with which I'm interested (and which is constantly, if sometimes obliquely, dealt with in this text) is a simple sort—a sort that is merely based on both identifying and then cultivating those experiences during which we feel most happy. Of course, *happiness* is a difficult term. What does it mean exactly? One is happy both when one is drunken and dancing at a party and also when one is sitting quietly by oneself—but, of course, each act is very different.

The answer to this question of “which happiness” is one that interests me a lot, but which I am not particularly qualified to answer. I am able only to sort of contemplate those things which I've read and am now able, with great mental strain, to parrot back to the world. Nor do the sorts of authors whom I read always deal in what some people snidely call “evidence.” Evidence, I've found, is not a whole lot of fun. What is fun is irrational, but strident appeals to the spiritual intellect! And rousing speeches which serve to ennoble, and not deride, the reader! And the confessions of authors who feel a deep love for their reader! And the transcripts of those same authors in their various unions with God/the Godhead/the One/Reality!

That I lose any sense of discerning readership in the presence of my favorite works is only a small consequence of the profound happiness that these works deliver me. If, to love Epicurus, and to be enamored of his ethical philosophy, I must also believe that shooting stars are the product of stars rubbing together, I am willing to accept that fact. On a practical level, it makes me no great threat to anyone, and perhaps helps me see the universe as an even stranger, more laughable thing than it already is.

II. Regarding the Present Text, Its Uses

It has come to my attention, by some very attentive and talented readers, that much of what follows does not read as *poetry*, per se, and that much of it lacks that magical or whimsical quality that has been the trademark of so much of my favorite work—work that I myself cite as part of *Chapters*. This is no mistake. Rather, what follows is a strident, concerted, sometimes fumbling, always committed appeal to the reader that he or she find the courage to trust his or her own self in the face of many obstacles. As to whether there are actually *more* of these obstacles now than ever before (borne of what my freshmen writing students frequently call “modern society” or “today's world”), it is not my duty to judge. Really, it makes no difference, though: we have no other society with which to contend but the modern one.

It has also been brought to my attention, by some less attentive and less sensitive readers, that the need for such a document as *Chapters*—that is, a document which attends to the infinitude of the private man/woman, and the relatively unpopular crisis of spiritual poverty—that the need for such a document is non-existent. Some of these people, undoubtedly, view me as soft or whimsical or out-of-touch or Self-Help-y or New Age or Christian (said with a sneer, you know)—or with one of many other effective and derisive epithets. I have no reply to this contingent, who clearly view the world in a very different way than I do. It is neither my duty nor my intent to cater to every worldview. And, if you, reader, are already non-plussed by what you've read up to this point, then you, too, may be one of these people for whom *Chapters* is not appropriate reading. What I do know is, is that I consider each chapter as having a purpose, and as having been composed in the same spirit that I intend it to provoke—that of Enthusiasm.

III. The Form of *Chapters*

The form of *Chapters*—the short paragraphs referred to alternately as sentences, chapters, or aphorisms—is borrowed almost entirely from the various texts of *The Philokalia*, the Greek book of wisdom, and Fr. James McGuckin's introduction to much of that same writing in *The Book of Mystical Chapters*. The chapters were intended for initiates into monastic life. “Each single sentence,” McGuckin writes,

is meant to be taken as a day's reflection. It was first supposed to be learned by heart, at the beginning of the day, and then repeated as the daily text in every spare moment of quiet. Such moments of *hesychia* (quietness of soul) were structured by the early monks around the simple repetitive tasks that made up daily life in remote deserts. The regular monotony of basket weaving (a favored monastic employment) was interspersed with the repetition of prayers and the musing on the “sentence” of the day.

My own reading differs slightly. First, I find that not every of the chapters is relevant, and therefore will spend time only with those that have the most relevance to my own particular situation. Second, I tend not to memorize my favorite chapters, but tend to re-visit them frequently in my own daily contemplations. That one follows exactly the

practices of early Christians is, I think, less the point than having some sort of successful practice, in general. For me, the chapters are so seductive that I never need to *will* myself to read them. It is only ever a pleasure. That what follows would provide a similar experience for the reader—to provoke these moments of Enthusiasm is my intention. That many of them will miss for you, reader, in particular, I have little doubt. What I do hope is that some of them—and that is enough—that some of them will resonate properly with you.

Finally, I should say that, in his book *The New Polytheism*, David L. Miller champions the aphorism as the literary form of the Theology of Play.

IV. Introdouching The New Enthusiasm

I am not one to name names, but I can not ignore that there are certain individuals writing and doing today who embody a new spirit—occasionally reckless, always liberating—designed to champion the infinitude of the private man or woman. Exactly *who* these artists are, I am not yet at liberty to say.

Know this, though: you will begin to see the work of New Enthusiasts, and it will be *ennobling*.

Carson Cistulli
Feast of Ray Hudson,
Patron Saint of The New Enthusiasm
March 24, 2007

CHAPTERS

1

By Enthusiasm, we mean little else besides a) the recognition of those moments when we feel Enthusiasm, and b) some attempt to put ourselves in situations where Enthusiasm will occur.

2

Enthusiasm needn't indicate an ecstatic, hyper-active sort of feeling, but rather the cultivation of those Talents and Interests which come to us most easily, as opposed to those which are allocated to us by external authorities or which we pursue difficultly by means of Will.

3

Those activities at which you excel with no effort at all—those are the ones you ought to pursue to the detriment of others. That same single-mindedness is also called Contemplation, or Prayer, in the religious tradition, where it is a prized quality.

4

To feel Enthusiasm, you'll have to embrace naiveté.
That said, you can't be stupid and Enthusiastic.

5

Enthusiasm is achieved chiefly by means of provocations. In these cases, something inside of us resonates vibrantly with something outside.

The form of the provocation—be it book, music, sporting event, conversation—matters insofar as it might help to us find these sources of resonance.

6

The sources for Enthusiastic provocation exist *en masse*, but they are scattered around and *different for each individual*. That there is some mystery to provoking Enthusiasm, there is no doubt.

7

Each person will have their own collection of provocations for Enthusiasm.

8

Leo Messi's goal versus Getafe is a provocation. In it, he conjugates human potential into every tense.

9

Pierre Hadot's *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision* is a provocation. In it, he hands out his syllabus to Destiny.

10

Cristiano Ronaldo himself is constantly a provocation. For example, he can tell all of *Gravity's Rainbow* in the form of a knock-knock joke.

11

Ray Hudson's commentary of Spanish football is a provocation. That's why he's patron saint of The New Enthusiasm.

12

William McNamara's *The Human Adventure* is a provocation. He wants to press charges against Restraint.

13

Emerson's essays are all provocations. In them, he gives nightmares to Counterfeits.

14

A. Bartlett Giamatti's *Take Time for Paradise* is a provocation. In it, he interestingly plays catch with a molecule.

15

Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" is a provocation. In it, he talks dirty to the Reaper.

16

St Diadochos of Photike's *On Spiritual Knowledge* is a provocation. It's like when you put sunglasses on a dog.

17

Abraham Maslow's *Religion, Values, and Peak Experience* is a provocation. In it, Science wears a tracksuit like you heard about.

18

For one who's had the benefit of a peak experience, it will be necessary to find the terms to describe it. Some you can find in extant writing. Others, you'll need to invent yourself.

19

In moments of Enthusiasm, one can attain a noetic quality not unlike that described by the big religious mystics. Whether this suggests the actual presence of a deity or not, is irrelevant. That the human intellect is capable of achieving so much pleasure is good enough in itself.

20

The less dependent one's happiness is on external forces, the more likely it will persevere. Enthusiasm, residing almost entirely in one's mind, is therefore very dependable.

21

Sean Casey worries when I discuss Enthusiasm—he worries that the idea is perhaps too "supernatural"—a state of which he's not convinced. What's funny is, his work absolutely shines with Enthusiasm. His process is similar, just with different words to explain it, is all.

That's so much better than the opposite: same words for a different process.

22

One Enthusiast text will vary greatly from another. The expanse of joy which they provoke in their respective Enthusiasts will be identical.

23

Enthusiasm is not a dogma of content, but one of form. It'll direct you to happiness, but the exact nature of this happiness is wholly inside *you*.

24

Many people are unwitting Enthusiasts—they're no less happy for it.

25

When people ask, "What is Enthusiasm?" I say, "It's a word." It's a cleverness that's not too clever, I admit. But thinking about it more, it becomes clever *again*.

26

My politics is short, adhering to this one rule in all cases: Any community ought to protect, and even encourage, the rights of its members to obey their True Nature.

Q. What if one's True Nature is to kill?

A. This would not accord with the above rule. To murder another would be, I think, to pretty seriously limit their ability to obey their True Nature.

27

Enthusiasm has very serious and well-defined political concerns. Enthusiasm supports only those candidates or parties who:

*Fill with delight while reading a classified ad for used potato chips.

*Play and love the video game called Local Business Owner.

*Always vote for the sun to rise.

*Throw their hands in the air, even when a song hasn't expressly requested it.

*Have had many torrid love affairs...with their True Self!

*Pump their fists while reading Makarios the Great.

*Have attempted to pay a bill using only a spirited aphorism as currency.

Note: this list is in no way exhaustive, but merely reflects Enthusiasm's most pressing concerns. Furthermore, while Enthusiasm has no dogma proper, it does have some core beliefs. To find more, contact your local True Nature, or reference your Inner Genius.

28

A Prayer of Enthusiasm is anything which gives you the courage to obey yourself.

29

The courage to obey *yourself*, and not an external authority—that's the main issue. That's the "leap of faith" you're required to make for happiness.

30

First, you must learn to hear yourself. Second, you must have the courage to obey your own commands.

31

Courage is a word that is badly misused. More often than not, it's attributed to those who're foolhardy or too stupid to know better. In truth, courage is that faculty by which we are able to trust our talents despite external pressure to the contrary.

32

When Simon says, "Touch your nose," people touch their nose. When he says, "Shuffle your feet," people do that, too.

From now on, instead of Simon, people should replace it with "My True Nature." The only thing it ever says is, "Live an authentic existence!"

33

Maybe I'll say it one more time: our Enthusiasm is a sign to us that we're obeying ourselves fully. Such circumstances as provoke Enthusiasm ought to be studied and re-created.

34

The exciting part of any work of art is not the work itself but the degree to which it reveals the artist's own Enthusiasm in his composition of the work. Whatever state of mind the artist was in, we feel it. So if the artist was merely attempting to achieve the appearance of something good, if he was composing laboriously, if he was attempting consciously to fulfill a niche in his genre, we feel it.

35

For my part, I respond to Enthusiasm—that state whereby God is inside the artist, where the artist composes not by order of his Will, but by obedience to his Nature.

36

A Prayer of Enthusiasm is any text both composed in and which evokes in its reader a feeling of Enthusiasm. A good writer, therefore, is simply one who is both sensitive to the experience of Enthusiasm and, in some way, able to apply that Enthusiasm to the order of his words.

37

Poetry, the way I would have it, is that writing which is the product of Enthusiasm—a.k.a., contemplation.

38

Contemplation, for our purposes, is that rapid silence during which a "union" takes place. Union with what, exactly, is less important—some say "God," others "the One," others "Reality," others "the unconscious." All the same, it is a characteristic of this state to feel a pouring into the mind and a different way of thinking.

39

The word Prayer is a synonym of Contemplation. Why I capitalize these words, I'm not entirely sure. As a grammar, it's not entirely consistent, but at least it's *inspired*.

40

Sir Philip Sidney wrote, "Look into thy heart and write!" It's such a great sentiment that now I apply it to all my other daily tasks: "Look into thy heart and shave!" I tell myself. And: "Look into thy heart and wash the dishes!"

41

Emerson said, "Poets record the flashes of light that go across the mind" or something like that. He said, "They go over to the other side and report back," or something like that.

To this I have two responses:

a) That I don't remember exactly, isn't the point. I've retained the spirit of the idea—which fact is completely Emersonian in itself.

and:

b) He's answering the question I posed earlier. His answer is "c) both," as best I can tell.

42

When I become aware that I'm writing a specific work, I'm no longer able to write well. On the other hand, when I'm able to obey myself fully, everything comes up roses.

If roses aren't your cup of tea, choose any flower that'd make sense in the context above. If a cup of tea isn't your cup of tea, then I am absolutely stymied.

43

Justin says, "We're all writing different things. It's only by habit that we call all these things 'poetry.'"

It's amazing: even someone with such conspicuous flaws experience moments of Enthusiasm.

44

For my part, I'd rather my work be grouped with and approached as prayers—rather than poems, I mean. A bad prayer—and there are many of them—a bad prayer is still directed towards God. A bad poem—and again, there are tons—a bad poem is directed toward the incompetent.

45

There's a state of being called "prayer," and it's what we might also call contemplation. In addition to that, there's a literary form called "prayer." So, I wonder to myself: Is this form written a) *while* in that state of prayer, b) to *provoke* that state of prayer in its reader, or c) both?

That I don't allow for "d) neither" is no mistake. If the prayer's author has no knowledge of the state called Prayer, his work will not concern me.

46

So, I wonder to myself: Is this form written a) *while* in that state of prayer, b) to *provoke* that state of prayer in another, or c) both?

I don't wonder too hard, though, lest reason takes over—at which point, I quit. Reason is antithetical to Prayer, which itself is intuitive.

47

What are the chances that a work of prayer written while in a state of contemplation will help its reader achieve the same state? Not 100%, for sure, but not 0%, either. And what's more, it's probably a better means to the end than any other.

48

The best writing—the best anything, maybe—originates not in Will but in Nature.

Excuse my rashness. Now that I think of it, "best everything" could include Best Method for Making Oneself Miserable.

49

We who experience Enthusiasm can quickly identify the others who do, as well: we give high fives on the street, we slap each other's asses and say, "Good game."

50

The Americans play a brand of soccer almost pathologically devoid of individual skill. The Brazilians incorporate individual skill into their style of play. The first play with a sense of morbid obligation, the latter with contagious spontaneity. The former require real effort to watch, the latter are a pleasure. The former win few games, the latter dominate.

This isn't a case of waxing poetic, I don't think. It's plain to see at World Cup 2006.

51

A system of play, regardless of its tactical brilliance, is basically worthless if it isn't tailored to the individual skills of its players. The players first and foremost decide the fate of a team.

P.S. If you think this is merely a commentary on sport, I'd suggest you try "metaphor" as a word of the day.

52

No system can treat its players as merely "interchangeable parts," but instead must account for those players' strengths and weaknesses. As players' ability is constantly changing, so too must the system.

53

You hear athletes say, "I just go out and give 110%." It's different for those who experience Enthusiasm. For us, we give 0%, because what we do requires no effort.

54

On the other hand, consider Cristiano Ronaldo. He runs all around the field, he gets tired, he's out of breath. How can I say he gives no effort? Because: he's only doing that which comes to him.

Is this a case of trifling semantics on my part?

55

Effort is that work we do that runs contrary, in some way, to our respective vocation.

56

For every bit of effort you give, you're that much further from experiencing Enthusiasm.

57

Ambition is antithetical to Enthusiasm. In Enthusiasm, we do that which comes to us most easily, while ambition is the state which compels us to pursue what does not come naturally—a.k.a., to disobey ourselves.

58

Ambition's even worse than effort. Effort could be required for an unpleasant task or job. Ambition, on the other hand, is *willful* effort.

59

If I sense effort in a poem, or anything discursive like that, I stop reading immediately. What's the point? I'm able to read God already; why should I lower my standards?

60

When I say "God," I mean "the idea called God," or "the feeling called God." If you're unable to divorce this from what you read in the Old Testament, I pity you. The Old Testament is only a first offer, on which we can—and ought to—greatly improve.

61

Paul Tillich, whose True Nature could bench 300 lbs, wrote: "Faith consists in being vitally concerned with that ultimate reality to which I give the symbolical name of God. Whoever reflects earnestly on the meaning of life is on the verge of an act of Faith."

62

The idea called God ought only to come from contact with that same idea. What some call Faith—that is, belief in God, never having felt It—I have other names for. Here's a hint: all of those names are intended to arouse pity.

63

Faith, like *courage*, is badly misused. Often, it's used to indicate unquestioning belief in God. In truth, Faith is that process by which we allow our talents to provide for us.

64

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

My exegesis: Oh no you didn't, Jesus of Nazareth!

65

A lot of dopes don't seem to recognize that moral philosophy—and with it, the means to happiness—has been mastered over and over again. Plato basically figured out, as did Aristotle, and Epicurus, and Plotinus, and Emerson—and those are just the whiteys. Still, you look at who's running the country, who's all over the papers: it's all these fools in love with vain pleasures. It's so ridiculous.

I'd fight harder to get rid of them, but that might rankle me. And we all know step number one on the road to happiness: Avoid all major rankling!

66

By Enthusiasm—"god inside"—I'm not suggesting a personal or anthropomorphic God.

If that's what you think, you haven't been listening!

67

For some time, I thought I couldn't be religious because I couldn't endure the boredom of church. Now I know that those pious services which induce the most boredom are, in fact, the *least* religious.

God is with us to the extent that we feel Enthusiasm!

68

A religious feeling need be nothing more than a sense of great relevance among different parts your life. Instead of "relevance," I could also say "unity" or "coherence."

For Enthusiasm, there are many synonyms, ya heard?

69

A religious feeling will follow when you are able to bear in mind a single principle throughout all your actions.

70

I have no problem with the rational proofs for God existence which comprise Natural Theology. No problem, that is, except this: they're not fun.

It is the *experience* of God that is most pleasant.

71

Why do we care if God exists if we can't feel It?

72

Many theological arguments will see entirely trivial to you once you have experienced Enthusiasm.

73

I doubted the existence of the Deity until I experienced it. Now that I've experienced it, it seems as a plain a fact as any.

74

Some might be wary of those times when I describe Enthusiasm as "communion with God." Secular people might disregard it either as ideology, or biochemistry; religious people, as blasphemy or solipsism. In either case, it's moot.

75

If Enthusiasm's nothing more than chemistry, it doesn't make the experience of it any less fantastic, nor its effects any less beneficial.

76

If Enthusiasm is ideology, it matters very little: those who experience Enthusiasm own the most significant means of production.

77

Enthusiasm is, by nature, the *opposite* or blasphemy. It is the religion *of* Jesus, not *about* him—which itself is the worst blasphemy possible.

78

Enthusiasm is by nature the *opposite* of solipsism. One who experiences Enthusiasm will feel detachment from self.

79

For those who have finally experiences Enthusiasm, congratulations. Now here's the next step: repeat ad infinitum.

80

I just learned about the ontological argument for the existence of God. The argument essentially states that because the concept of "God" exists, then so must God exist, too. That's fine. What's hilarious to me, though, is that so-called intelligent people have dedicated their adult lives toward developing and refining this argument.

This leads me to think: perhaps we should pay less attention to the meaning of "God" and more to our understanding of what's "intelligent."

81

Somehow—and there are theories as to how this came about—but somehow we have developed the impression that those things which are most important to our lives must also be the most boring. Likewise, that which is most boring, many assume to be important for that very reason. What's more, that which is easy or spontaneous we view with suspicion, or dismiss as mere entertainment.

It's as if every day were Opposite Day when people act like that.

82

The true purpose of spiritual laws—a.k.a., dogma—is to promote the experience of Enthusiasm, not crush it. The ten commandments, in theory, protect us from that intrigue which can disrupt Enthusiasm. That they should be viewed as divinely sent, however, is completely laughable.

83

Here's a commandment that the Old Testament omits: "Thou shalt do the dishes when thy ladyfriend ask thee to."

Anyone who lives with a lady already know what I mean—a.k.a., that this commandment will save him from anxiety. Therefore, it is a true commandment

84

Kali doesn't recognize when I wash the dishes, only when I *don't* wash them. Some other things are like that, that I can't remember at the moment.

Oh, I remember: I think "breathing" was one of them. Another one was also "going to college."

85

The next time you read St Diadochos of Photike, replace each instance of the phrase "spiritual awareness" with "Enthusiasm," and you will understand how both concepts are compatible.

86

The next time you read St Diadochos of Photike, replace each instance of "a" with "the." This will not help your understanding of the work at all, but might be fun at least as an exercise.

87

People don't need a lot of words from Carson Cistulli that they could already get from Evagrius or Diadochos or basically *any* of the big guns. Except that's not the only consideration. Evagrius and everyone are dead—accordingly, they worry very little about book sales. I, on the other hand, have an apartment to worry about and a lady and other expenses. Therefore, I suggest you find a place for me in your library—until I die, at least. After that, feel free to let my book rot, it won't bother me at all.

88

My friend Sean asks me, "Is this an *ars poetica* you're writing?" I answer him: "Sean, everything I do is basically an *ars poetica*."

89

My friend Sean asks me, "Is this an *ars poetica* you're writing?" I answer him: "There's definitely an arse in it somewhere."

90

Certain authors—and I know some of them, unfortunately—certain of them are concerned with their work *lasting*.

In many cases I think they will be successful: their work will last as an example of what *not* to do.

91

I'd like to stress process as much as content in these chapters. Frequently, as you might recognize, the sentiments themselves are not particularly original: I concede that. Still I think the delivery is peculiar to my voice. "A mixture of sage and cynic," would be a starting place for anyone writing a review. Unless it's a bad review, I mean. In that case, I have a different starting place for you: *to become illiterate immediately*.

92

Diogenes was called "cynic" because he lived in utter, frequently ragged simplicity—like a dog ("cynic" is Greek for "dog"). Today we call people "dog" because they have sex with women from behind, I think is the reason. Now I'm wondering who we'll call "dog" in the future. If society can't think it up, I have a suggestion: Carson Cistulli.

93

According to Howard Zinn, history is the history of victims and executioners. Oh yeah, Howard Zinn, what about the Carson Cistullis? Step out of your house and we're everywhere—with our slingshots pointed at your little head.

94

Regarding that thing I said about Howard Zinn, I'm sorry. I mean, it's still true; I'm just sorry it has to be the case. Maybe Howard Zinn won't make the same mistake in the future. Which mistake is that?, you ask. I'll tell you: the one where he becomes a parody of indignation.

95

A goal in life is to relieve yourself of any unpleasant obligations. That's true, maybe, but to do so is difficult in practice. One still has a phone bill, rent, and all that to pay. One has parents who request his presence. One has an essay to write on the Treatment of Pythagorean Arithmology in Macrobius' *Commentary*.

If it's unclear from the context, you can substitute "one" with "Carson Cistulli" in the paragraph above. Not just that, but you can do it for anyone's writing ever—just like that famous novel and film you've heard of: *Carson Cistulli Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

96

David Dunbar, a great teacher I had, says that most learning occurs in the transition from utter confusion to boring routine. To learn, then, we must purposely cultivate times of confusion.

If you're looking for practical advice on how to achieve this state, look elsewhere: I've said as much as I'm qualified for.

97

Fewer people have been influenced by my writing than by the sight of my sickly legs. The only problem is, the sight of my legs has influenced them poorly—like to vomit on themselves or something.

That's why my writing takes such an affirmative tact: to repair all the suffering that my legs have caused.

98

A man who considers himself wealthy but also works many hours—that man hasn't correctly valued his free time.

99

After having covered my expenses with my work, each hour after that I value at roughly \$300/hr.

a) The calculation I use for this is very complex, so unfortunately I can't reproduce it here.

b) The calculation I use for this is very complex—
a.k.a., entirely intuitive.

100

Each \$10 I don't spend is another hour I needn't work.

Under the terms of my accounting, then, I've turned that \$10 into \$300. In other words, I'm the most able investor of my generation, who makes unbelievable gains almost all of the time.