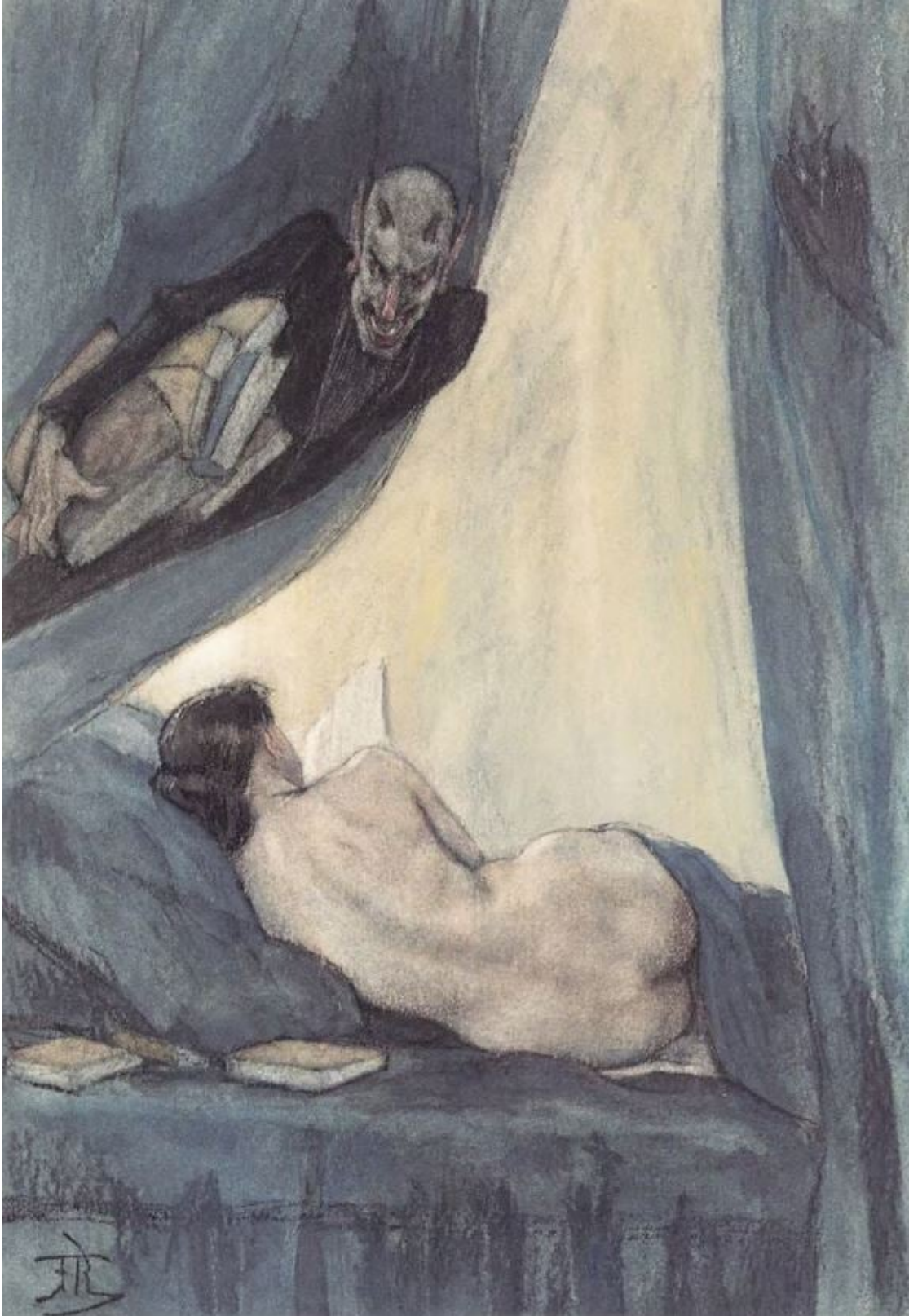


Black Paint from the Tube

by [Carl Nelson](#) (September 2024)



The Library (Félicien Rops, 1881)

"The need for mystery is greater than the need for an answer." –Ken Kesey

Whenever anyone says that someone doesn't make sense, the implicit question is always, is it because that 'someone' doesn't make sense, or is it because the person speaking can't understand them? I've met quite a few contemptuous atheists who to my mind would seem not to understand religion at all. While they might retort, that there is "nothing to understand. It's all bollocks." (Then add something about, "follow the science!") Nothing makes them angrier than to be rebuked by the counter retort that they seemingly haven't the mental capacity to grasp a religious paradigm. This is not just me becoming vexed. I mean it, truly. After having worked with and known several quite fervid atheists, they seem quite walled off by their incapacity, like dyslexics who can't read what we all have been taught to understand. When the talk is about faith and God, many an atheist reaction reminds me of an Aspergers sufferer or an autistic when harassed by normal life; that is, more closeness (more 'paradigm') than they can process. (Perhaps we should hold them tight in a "restrainer" –before engaging in religious discussion–such as Dr. Temple Grandin developed to calm cattle prior to slaughter.)

(As a side irritation: Atheists are notably first, ironically, to claim the moral high ground. An argument they invariably trot out is to point up "all the wars and persecutions brought about by people's blind adherence to religious beliefs."

A fellow artist was selling me this harangue one day while

riding in his beater Honda.

“What is a religion but just words? Just air leaving the mouth? Just what we’re doing right here. Where’s the violence, the killing? Could you point to where you feel the injury or are feeling the pain?” I asked.

He couldn’t, then vaguely indicated around the ears.

“Whereas science has given us nerve gases, Gatling guns, air superiority, weaponized diseases, ... nuclear war. It seems to me that science has much more to answer for than religion ever might.”

His decided then that we should discuss something else.

I told him, “No. I’d like to continue this vein of thought. I think we’re getting somewhere.” (His ear pain be damned.)

But I couldn’t get any more out of him.)

Atheists are about evidence. Religious people are about faith.

But we may find/see evidence of faith in an artist’s work especially. It doesn’t need stand up and witness. Likely, it’s more convincing if it doesn’t. I, personally, find it more compelling when the artwork glows with promise (faith) as the subtext builds. Religion needn’t even be mentioned. The harbinger is that faith is not avoided, but will bleed through everything. Or rather, what is immanent in the actual world glows through the work.

There is nothing immanent in an atheist’s work (except perhaps, ego). “If you have something to say (artistically),” one such artist complained. “Why don’t you just say it?”

An atheist’s work doesn’t glow. Rather it is more like a balance sheet in which a character’s social worth is

estimated, then the story commences, the trial ensues, and his total is tallied up and scored. They seem to see life something like an autistic, and have a cartoon like love of the measuring of event.

Religious people acknowledge evidence. The Church was one of the original facilitators of the Enlightenment, urging the faithful to study God's wonders so as to bring back more information about the Lord's works and to expand His glory. The nascent and future atheists who practiced this, then went out and decided that what they saw was all about themselves; that is, all of that other physical matter. Once they had staked a "scientific claim" –they were the claimant, and God was not. God, in their enlightened paradigm, had nothing either to do with either a specimen's origins or its nature.

I find this ludicrous as in the end stages of imperialism, when the young and childlike United States sallied forth and staked their claim to Thailand, planting the flag, in effect, in the King's front yard. "What are you doing there?" the Thai King wondered. "We've claimed your country," he was told. For the atheist there is no mystery—and no prior ownership. There are simply things we don't know (haven't claimed) ... yet. (But will. Just ... "follow the science.")

In the theatre, the difference between an atheist's play and that of a person of faith was often plain. Nothing was born from the atheist's characters, which were plywood cut-outs. Rather, character was revealed, in a continuing saga of an evolving back-story in which current revelations arose from an evolving elucidation of past event. That is, for a surprise to occur, the surprise was in the (planted) back-story evidence to be found. It was all rather like a show trial. The real suspension of disbelief was in the linkage of back-story to event. Certain past events will dictate certain future situations, is the dictum, which the ensuing play paints in reverse. It was politic to accept this. For example, sexual abuse was a great catch-all, explaining all sorts of socio and

psychopathic behavior, and a fine exculpation. Nearly all sins were forgiven. Minority status worked well too, as an indulgence.

In a faith-based play, these characters had made a choice to either ally with or deny evil. In the atheist play there was no choice. Their environment and history had defined them. The moral of the atheist's tale was that we must reform either the environment or the family dynamic, if we are to have a better outcome. In the faith-based story, a better outcome is had when the talismans of God's presence and will are heeded and these indications followed. The faith based character is born mysterious and capable of near any transformation. The atheist created characters have been fully determined. There is no mystery; only denouement. And we get the results wanted by seeding a back-story to support them. (It's the show trial, again.)

The atheist playwright's characters were innately boring, so that odd, transgressive, highly prejudicial events were the ground across which the play was driven (or drug by its heels?) to heighten interest. Important political or social taboos were often addressed. Whether "change" was initiated by the event was the big question.

The faithfuls' plays were often much quieter and the mystery of the character overshadowed the commonness of the events. Finding out how God had designed us and how best to honor this was the great exploration.

But the glow of faith can also shine from the words of prose writers. Someone like Theodore Dreiser—a Communist, who "portrayed life as a struggle against ungovernable forces" (Goodreads) —can lay down the gritty details of a scene well as any blueprint. But it takes someone faith based, like Cheever, to make the scene glow like a summer holiday:

Cheever was at his best in recording the splendor of the receding sun, the magic hours stretching from late afternoon to twilight: 'The sun going down takes many forms,' he wrote, 'gold, brass cauldrons, streaks of lemon yellow and then, unexpectedly, a field of rose.'

Alert to the transcendent in the everyday, he perceived a 'moral quality' in the very light that fell on the Dutch Colonial homes and lush lawns of the commuter suburbs outside New York. His characters might drink too much, they might break their vows, but they are usually drawn back toward order and light. 'Stand up straight,' he urged his readers. 'Admire the world. Relish the love of a gentle woman. Trust in the Lord.' —Matthew Schmitz, in *First Things*

On an even more contemporary note, I have a good atheist friend who has read every Travis McGee crime/mystery novel by John D. MacDonald, and then had begun reading them all over again. I remembered having read one, but couldn't recall why I'd stopped. I figured I'd just wandered on to another roadside attraction. So it seemed it might be a good idea to pick Travis back up, as the wife and I are planning a short getaway full of reading and swimming. So I purchased a used, *The Turquoise Lament* as it was there at my book store.

Of course, I couldn't wait for our short vacation. (I must open whatever book arrives to take just a taste, before placing it in the queue.) So I got sucked in and about halfway through I remarked to the wife that I might have to buy a different summer fun read, because "I don't like this guy (Travis McGee) so much. Or perhaps, it's the author." I couldn't tell. "Perhaps," I thought out loud, "it's because his metaphors seem roughly assembled or unnatural, or because there isn't much lyricism to the writing. He does the manly, estimating the threat, gumshoe with predatory world view,

female/male dance fairly well ... but there is no spirituality to it," I finally declared. "And without that, I really can't feel a pulse. What's the point?" Travis McGee is troubled by his sins but, solaced by his atheist beliefs, ascribes his misbehaviors as those of any other beast. No foul. We must accept the world as it is, would be his demurrer. It's a moral life conceived ... with an escape hatch.

"I mean, what kind of a guy lives in Florida, anyway?" I remarked to the wife, irritably. It reminded me of what my brother had said regarding his years of retirement spent sailing the Pacific. That there seemed a breaking point after getting to Mexico that first year and wintering through the hot, breezeless Baha downtime, where his fellow cruisers would suddenly awaken, as if from a spell, and realize they were sitting around cooking in the sun far from everywhere ... 'and is this all there is going to be—for the rest of our lives?' This was the elephant in the cockpit never mentioned, but circled, over evening drinks.

It's the kind of revelation which can make you sell a boat, (or set a book), and to get back on track. It's like a lightning bolt on the road to Damascus.

I would contrast MacDonald with a more hallowed crime writer, Raymond Chandler:

At seven the rain had stopped for a breathing spell, but the gutters were still flooded. On Santa Monica the water was level with the sidewalk and a thin film of it washed over the top of the curbing. A traffic cop in shining black rubber from boots to cap slogged through the flood on his way from the shelter of a sodden awning. My rubber heels slithered on the sidewalk as I turned into the narrow lobby of the Fulwider Building. A single drop light burned far back, beyond an open, once gilt elevator. There was a

tarnished and well-missed spittoon on a gnawed rubber mat. A case of false teeth hung on the mustard-colored wall like a fuse box in a screen porch. (The Big Sleep)

Or, as he wrote in the *The Simple Art of Murder*:

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world.

Don't tell me that honor is merely a chemical reaction or that a man who deliberately gives his life for another is merely following a behavior pattern.

A Robert Parker testified: "Chandler had the right hero in the right place, and engaged him in the consideration of good and evil at precisely the time when our central certainty of good no longer held."

As I got further along in this thought-piece I'm constructing here, it occurred to me that there would seem to be a direct relationship between possessing a lyrical nature and having a personal access to the guidance of faith. Too rational mindsets pen descriptive excursions seemingly captured by the quantifiable, like bean counters exulting at large numbers. They seemingly lack the lyrical wherewithal to make the metaphorical leap to escape a paradigm (their item sheet). They would think faith an idiocy—even as it calls to them from the other side of the ledger like a mischievous siren.

As I finished MacDonald's novel, it occurred to me that I couldn't have found a better vehicle for illustrating the gap between the atheist and faith-based writer, if I had written the story myself.

About halfway through *The Turquoise Lament*, MacDonald's narrative tread finally grips substance and the story begins ripping along like a good yarn. The suspected villain, Howie Brindle, is first described as: "a likeable hulk ... Comfortable. Undemanding. A listener who never butts in ... who laughs in all the right places, and not too loudly or long." He's described by Pidge, (his cheating wife) as like a house, where you enter the front door, look around, and then go through another door to discover more, and find you're back outside. In short, after his true face shows, Howie, is found out to be a sociopath "for lack of a better term" (MacDonald).

My offer of "a better term" would be that Howie was a black hole—and like Hell, the complete absence of God.

When finally confronted: "He kept that baffled look almost all the way. It slipped just once, and gave me a quick glimpse of what he was ... It was something out of the blackness. It was night. It was evil ... blackness was there in Howie Brindle." (MacDonald)

In oil painting there are two ways to create darkness. One is to buy a tube of black oil paint and use it. The second is to create your darkness from a mix of all the remaining colors. Students are cautioned against using tube black as it "creates a hole" in the painting. Nothing goes in or comes out. It holds no mystery; it holds only absence. It is the visual embodiment of not what we don't know but rather of just 'nothing,' while the remaining colors are what we do know.

When the darkness is created from a mixing of various colors, there is no hole, there is no absence. In fact, in the very darkness we sense the presence of the other colors; there is

warmth and a body to it. There is mystery, and even knowledge of the mystery in a mixed darkness—and to the quite astute and subtle mind, a variety to the mysteries displayed. There is God in the light, and there is God in the darkness. Black from the tube is more like Hell.

Howie Brindle was black paint from a tube.

While Raymond Chandler's darkness was from a deftly applied mix of human attributes and flaws.

As the wrap-up: In MacDonald's tale, our private eye loses his lover, Pidge, (who he, of course, he had bedded while married to Howie—no foul), to a psychologist who, in the denouement, runs her group therapy recovery session. Group therapy is the nearest arrow in the Left's quiver to attending Church, where the psychologists are its Ministers of the Faith who deliver absolutions.

In my reading of the situation, Pidge is lured by a need for a faith she does not know, and which Travis can't offer. If the book were to proceed through a sequel, I would guess that the psychologist Pidge runs off with will fail her likewise – just as the Progressive Left's dogma has failed our culture and our country.

As Solzhenitsyn famously noted a truth he had come upon following years of exhaustive research:

Over half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.'

“There's no mystery. There's just things we don't know.”

-That's black paint from a tube.

As a closing coda:

One of the reasons my atheist buddy is such a good friend is that he lives a more Christian Life than most Christians I know. He practices everything but the Faith, which he must have (though denying it fiercely) -otherwise, why would he live such as he does? And he labors ferociously against his better nature. I intend to tell him this, one day.

Bulbs: I Told You They Were There

"Just leave the citizen alone! And he will fix the country." -A Conservative Patriot

Every spring, our hastas push from the bare soil
with their sprouts at first resembling spear tops
of soldiers, before unfurling their flags of lavish leaves.
From out of nothing is an appearance at first menacing.
Who would have anticipated such
held in lengthy silence beneath the bare soil,
only to extend and unspool rapidly?

I love bulbs, which require no tending,
no weeding, no recognition, but appear
as by magic rearing their blooms.
Like a poem coming to the end of its reveal
to say to the poet, who is saying to the world,
"See, I told you we were there!"
These wonderful introverts,
silence is their element,
extroverting only to display their gift,
before vanishing again.

Atheists, Progressives...
all those descendents of Bentham's Utilitarians

– who can't feel the generative nature of nothing!
They have no inner 'bulb' to feel the moisture of life
or respond to the heat of the sun. Their belief:
"If we don't do something, nothing will happen."
Though every Spring, Everything Happens!
All over again: the odors, the colors, the beauty–
unless, of course, it's been paved in Bureaucratic Gray.

[Table of Contents](#)

Carl Nelson's latest book of poetry titled, *Strays, Misfits, Renegades, and Maverick Poems (with additional Verses on Monetizations)*, has just been published. To have a look at this and more of his work please visit [Magic Bean Books](#).

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)