

Event-Scenes: e053

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Void Reports: 2. The City of Disney, Book II

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Dispatch from Orlando, Florida

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Augustine of Epcot

"Quis," inquit [Mulier Philosophia], "has scenicas meretriculas ad nunc aegrum permisit accedere quae dolores eius non modo nullis remediis foverent, verum dulcibus insuper alerent veneris?"

- Boethius, *Philosophia Consolationis*, I, 28-32

"Who," asked Lady Philosophy, "let those theatrical harlots approach this sick man, who not only provide no remedy for his pain but in truth make it worse with sweet poison?"

- Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*

Rapieabant me spectacula theatrica plena imaginibus miseriarum mearum et fomitibus ignis mei. Quid est, quod ibi homo vult dolere cum spectat luctuosa et tragica, quae tamen pati ipse nolle? Et tamen pati vult ex eis dolorem spectator et dolor ipse est voluptas eius. Quid est nisi miserabilis insania?

- Augustine, *Confessionum*, III, ii, 13-18

Theatrical spectacles, filled with images of my miseries and kindling of my fire, swept me away. Why is it that a person is willing to suffer things sorrowful and tragic on the stage, which otherwise he himself would not wish to endure? And nevertheless the spectator wishes to feel the sadness from these things and the sadness itself is his pleasure. What is this if not wretched insanity?

- Augustine, *Confessions*

I am an associate professor of theology in the Department of Disney Studies at a university in the vicinity of Orlando. The institution is reminiscent of its medieval counterpart, whose life my illustrious forebear animated with Platonizing idealism. It was the epicenter of a learning whose miraculous Core was the Transubstantiation of common bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Savior, incomprehensible to the ratiocinations even of my Aristotelian brother, St. Thomas, whose logic Rose in a spiraling architecture almost reaching Heaven. In these Fallen times, in the Era of Freedom, the only miracle left is Fiction: that process of making by which common words are pulled like writhing Fishes from the Basket of Commerce and spread to the multitude not only through Business but also, more strangely, through Metaphoric

Transmutation. In this way everyday locutions may be wrested from the Machinations of Consumption in which they circulate endlessly, like souls whose only remaining life, whose only "breath," psyche, as my Greek friends used to say, is in their forlorn images. In this Dread Current the visage or Imago takes over the role once played by a Substantia more inward, Deep, and as some would say profound: Imagines in profundo, Images on the Deep, on a river whose depths now shine with Mercury, the once Roman deity who carried the news from Zeus to Aeneas, in his quest for the City that would last, now himself transsubstantiated into a missive somewhat less illuminating if nonetheless clear. For he now enters the bodies of fishes and of Babes, ones born of Woman, that is, Lord, and not the ones apparently in the minds of AM (Angelic Monstrosities) Radio (Radical Assimilation of Discourse into Odium) Angeloi, or "announcers" as they are now called: those Siren voices who promise that nubile female children will be available for Masculine Speculation at local Events, predicated like human adjectives to the nouns of Money and Power. But this is all part of the economy of Feminine post dramatis personae conjured by the New Sacred wedding of the Virgin Barbie with CAPITAL (Christ After Promotion Immaculate To Absolute Lucre, the Immaculate Promotion being a new idiom for the mysterious conjunction of the divine with the human in the realm of the electrified Secular), which serves as one SubText, or perhaps better a Side Show, of the our national Melodrama.

It seems, Your Authorship, that in these times I must ply my trade as a clerk of academe who serves the old Hierarchy, where I used to be a cleric, in a new Form upholding a new Faith. Now the old education, in the Trivium and Quadrivium, has been itself transmuted, for the Grammar Rhetoric and Dialectic have been expanded to inhabit what that old Republican Cicero, author of *Somnium Scipionis* or the *Dream of Scipio*, called *Res Publica*. For the Republic of Capital, my new home in this Time of Vicissitude, is enmeshed in an Electro-Nick Web of grammars, animated by the vehement rhetorics and dialectics of Entropy animated by Desire. Were I still on the run from Florence with my old Thomist friend, Dante Alighieri (Your satiric DA and literary prosecutor of evangelical Corruption), I would characterize the imagines circulating in this meshwork, this woeful Interstate Way, as the Demonic Traffick of Dead Souls: the Personae of the new American Electropolis, centered in Washing-Ton but soon to be decentered to Your new Kingdom near Orlando, a fitting Capital for this Republic, as it is the utopian Mentor of its Trivia. This last word, indeed, your Abovitall, transfinite Limit of our Dreams, is a sign in my own discourse, here, that my Topick is at hand, for the Mentation of Triviality has become a fully absorbing occupation for the Industry of Culture in our brave new Empire of Signs, the one St. Debord called the Society of the Spectacle.

How to convey to human sense, Lord, the post-human condition? St. Hoffman, that revolutionary "for the Hell of it" (if you will forgive this locution from Below) who inhabited a local Abbie in the era of the Pentagon Levitation, once re-marked, confounding Aristotle, that politics is a species of Theatre. In the scheme of That peripatetic Greek, this would make politics a kind of Fiction, a species itself of the only miracle left, but, one must ask, a story Authored by Whom and for What? The stage, that plane of evil on which so many vanities have displayed themselves before the eyes of the Damned-to-be, at least as I saw it in the Late Empire, where I taught Rhetoric to the

Children of Decay in the hope that they might thereby rewrite their own minds into stories more viable. This was the stage where, nevertheless, I saw the Wit of Terence displayed in Satire admirable of the Republican Roman Character, in the Persona of Heautontimorumenos or "The Self-Tormentor." That miserable character was the source of all his own problems, as are we All, Lord, yet whose anguish was, still, the anguish of the City, our collective persona to whom You gave new Life and Form Divine, as I imagined in *Civitas Dei* or *The City of God*. Hence the anguish of Rome gained a Horizon beyond its Present Woe and the Hope to animate its poor, its outcasts, and its refugees. Now they flock to a New City, one under a sign so peculiar, my Light, that I am almost hesitant to utter its name, though in your omniscience you are doubtless already aware of its Signs bearing the emblem, Civitas Muris, City of the Mouse, which may remind you of that illustrious P. Decius Mus (P. Decius the Mouse or, his enemies would say, "the Rat") and his son who offered themselves to Death for the sake of their country. Now that I think of it, my Remembrance, W. Disney Mouse may have done us a similar service, leaving us a City into whose streets and Arcades living souls enter but mostly Dead ones emerge, having undergone a New, postmodern metamorphosis in which we All are drawn by Desire to give our lives for the New City, and so are being transformed daily, each of us who treads into the New Kingdom of Magic, into those very imagines that circulate in the Body Electric, and currently in Shock, of our Republic. For our state of what Aristotle would have called Phantasia, of knowledge based, particularly in our day, on the Phantasm, is prone to be affected by the quality of the Stream of Appearances, as were those onetime viewers of Tragedy and Comedy, or more recently the viewers of their Combination in St. Beckett, by the parade of Laughter and Regret before their eyes, or more recently still, by the glittering river of glee and scandal circling our President's head like a Halo of Furies on the Tele-Vision, "A Theatre of the Absurd" in the words of one Danish journalist describing the Media Storm circling the Chief, as He, meanwhile, furiously tries to adjust his Aureate Plate.

As a doctor of theology, of course, I know little of politics proper, for my speciality is spiritualite electronique, a discipline emerging a la mode d'information in the era of Late capITalism. The bodily spectacle of our Leader I therefore humbly leave to commentators more erudite and focus, instead, on what is, in any case, my traditional area: his Halo. Those "tall camels of the spirit," as a poet friend of mine once called them, rarely appear on the digital sands of HyperTime without, it seems, worldly merchandise bearing them down the Road of Commerce toward Dis, whose halo is not so bright as it once was, either; but the eddies of light circling Clintonus Pius are more troubling, toned as they are by what appear to be Vampire Bats whose greed is in exact proportion to their ferocity, as they whirl, just on the ridge of the Lustful verging on the Violent, along Phlegethon the River of Fire, as Dante would have situated them, crying out for blood. But this is not the Wine of the Sacrament which your First Son shed for us, Pater, but the pulse of a strange new sacrifice, yea, and Feast. It seems that the Authorities do not agree on what sin to choose for their Commander in Chief, as some keep pointing toward Lust while others prefer Treachery, a sin falling far below into the pit, a sin Some so admire as a destination for our First Gentleman that they have encouraged it in others just so, apparently, they may have Presidential Company beneath the frozen surface of that forbidden lake where the Adversary is up to his Anus in Ice, as You commanded. So

They, led by one of those former beings of Heaven and now from You know Where, a Starr, have suborned a friend to lie to a friend, had her "wired" in a metaphor that is of interest to both areas of my speciality, electric and spiritual, in order to capture the "truths" of Monica (the name of my own beloved Mother, St. Monnica, who I fear has reincarnated here just to remonstrate with Mr. Clinton as she used to with me) on "tape" (a metaphor derivative, to my mind, from the trapping of flies) in order in turn to capture her previous lies under oath, in order in turn to capture the President sub-Orning her to lie, in order to prevent His lies from being exposed: all of which serves to cover pudenda that, of course, should be, if Dante is right which he usually with Your help IS, in the realm of the hot and Lustful (an area in which I myself dabbled, as I have previously Confessed, while at Carthage, just like that Aeneas Pius and his Friend Dido, before finding Your Love) and not, traditionally, in the chilly realm of the Treacherous. So it seems to my limited mind, Lord, that the Road we are on here does not lead to Rome or Paradise, but to a City more Enigmatick and Estranged.

In the era of the electro-nick spirit, my Illuminator, I fear there is a great danger. The Imago Feminae of the Western tradition, whose polarities are, as Boethius experienced in his prison visions, the Goddess (Philosophy) and the Harlot (Theatre), has now been predicated onto a new Subject, and in her new form made to circulate not only around the head of the President but along that glittering Via Commercii. On this Proud Highway She is represented both in the forms of Commodified Personae, like Barbie, in the Theatre of Desire, and, I fear, in the guise of new Moral Tokens in the Theatre of Politics. Here her function is not another's redemption, as my mother Monnica and our Lady Mary and, of course, Lady Philosophia, offered nor liberte nor liberation de femmes - not "human" or "women's" liberation - and certainly not fraternite or confrerie feminine, "brotherhood" or "sisterhood," but something Else more Strange. This Else is an old Story, but in the politics of the Empire of Desire, the story has taken on new ViTality. For in the Era of Late CapITalism, where the two Moral Imperatives are "Save" and "Spend," the contradictory quality of ethical injunctions has become Theatrick, so that Public Servants must Sell their candidacies by self-adornment with Signs themselves both Moral and eroTick promising Happiness or Eudaimonia (as Aristotle used to say to counter that Plato's aspiration toward Death) or even Love, IF one only becomes both a Devotee of Christ and a Predicate of Commerce. Whether this be the search for Thanatos or Eros or the Two in angrily coiling Form, my Spire, I am not certain, though I have noticed that the Iraqis are preparing for a possible rain of venom. So perhaps we should question the Signs emanating from the head of Mr. Clinton to see if we can glean a tilt toward information Genesis or en-tropy Production Apocalyptique: New markers on the Way to the American Dream.

Listen to the voices from the Halo, now, to hear the cries of Lamentation, Recrimination and Woe:

The Tape:

LINDA TRIPP: What do you mean? How? Tell me how? [What am I] supposed to say if they say, "Has Monica Lewinsky ever said to you that she is in love with the president

or is having a physical relationship with the president?" If I say no, that is f---ing perjury. That's the bottom line. I will do everything I can not to be in that position. That's what I'm trying to do... I think you really believe that this is very easy, and I should just say f--k it. They can't prove it.

MONICA LEWINSKY: I believe you, but obviously I don't have the same feelings about the situation...

TRIPP: What do you mean? . . .

LEWINSKY: I was brought up with lies all the time... that's how you got along... I have lied my entire life.... ("The Lewinsky Tapes: 'This is Sick, This is Sick,'" Newsweek, online, Jan. 25, 1998)

From the Street:

VIVIEN ROUSSAN (African American retiree): I think that the president should stick to whatever issues he has already included in his State of the Union Address. It's time our country quit making a spectacle of itself, internationally. We are the most powerful country in the world; we shouldn't become the buffoon of the world. . . . I believe the President is suffering so much because in many areas he has tried to do the right thing where no one else has. When you begin to deal with issues of African Americans, when you appoint that number people to the Cabinet, when you make public efforts, however poor they are, at beginning dialogue, then this country, with its history of racism, is going to give you a very difficult time. (CSPAN Interview, January 26)

HILLARY CLINTON: "You know, I wouldn't say that it's not hard," Mrs. Clinton calmly acknowledged to reporters on Wednesday as the story broke like a tidal wave over her, "because it is difficult and painful any time someone you care about, you love and you admire is attacked and subjected to such relentless accusations as my husband has been. But I also have now lived with this for, gosh, more than six years, and I have seen how these charges and accusations evaporate and disappear if they're ever given the light of day." ("As Always, First Lady Stands by Her Man" by James Bennett, New York Times, Sunday, January 25)

BILL CLINTON: I want you to listen to me. I'm gonna say this again. I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Ms. Lewinsky. I never told anybody to lie, not a single time, never. These allegations are false. And I need to go back to work for the American People. (4 CNN, "Child Care," January 26, 1998)

SYLVIA POGGIOLI: "Throughout Europe editorial comment reflects widespread anxiety that the White House scandal could lead to a political paralysis and that the absence of American leadership on the world stage could jeopardize international security. President Clinton's alleged behavior is not the target." Summarizing the European news, Poggioli reports (NPR, "Morning Edition," Rome, Jan. 26):

LE MONDE: "Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr belongs to the Republican right and is subjecting Washington to an incredible number of bedroom investigations - Zealotry Meets French farce."

THE GUARDIAN: "Scandal threatens to become the engine of national politics."

FRANKFURTE ALLGEMEINE: "While America is certainly a democratic country, Clinton could also be the target of one of those cycles of pitiless puritanism with totalitarian tendencies that occasionally afflict the United States."

LA REPUBBLICA (ROME): "The investigative machine [the FBI, now employed by Kenneth Starr] that failed to prevent the World Trade Center bombing by international terrorists and the Oklahoma City Bombing by American terrorists will this time perhaps uncover in the glare of the international spotlight the culprit of a love story on a couch."

THE INDEPENDENT (LONDON): Contemplating the possibility that the scandal could bring down the leader of the world's foremost democracy: "If this happens it will represent the greatest victory yet for monstrous triviality over reasoned debate in the political life of the West."

The Tape:

TRIPP: This is so amazingly huge to me... I know it's huge to you... I'm being a sh---y friend and that's the last thing I want to do because I won't lie. How do you think that makes me feel? I can make you stop crying and... I feel like I'm sticking a knife in your back and I know at the end of this, if I have to go forward, you will never speak to me again and I will lose a dear friend...

LEWINSKY: Look, I will deny it so he will not get screwed in the case, but I'm going to get screwed personally.

TRIPP: ...This is sick, this is sick...

"**When love dies**, there's nothing and this world is only horror." (St. Acker, *My Mother: Demonology*, 105)

The descent from Desire to Treachery, I confess, frightens me even more than the Ride down Space Mountain at Disney World, for its Signs point toward a Downward Spiral, as St. Reznor put it, into a new Abyss whose depths are as unlimited as cyberspace. As Dante saw, Treachery is the antithesis of Love, replacing its fire, however passionate, with ice. Once, long ago, I wrote the demonology of my own soul which turned out to be the model of psychomachia, the war between the Mind and the Body, that would become Christian and, in turn, Western Civilization. Now, in this Era, I surmise that it's time for some Confessional Revision. For as Almost St. Hacking has argued, in a significant revision of our psyche entitled *Rewriting the Soul*, our ethic has become confessing not our own failings but, more insidiously, my Judge, holding forth the sins of Others in

order to reach a new End: not Salvation or Enlightenment or Justice or even Propriety, but rather, Omnipotens, Power in the service of Control. "Perhaps all humans have ever meant by love is control" as St. Acker goes on to say, and I might emphasize, "Perhaps," but my old Friend Dante had a different view, even amidst the Corrupt body of an ecclesiastical order which my more recent cohort, St. Nietzsche (yes, I Admit this Lord and Intend later to explain, as part of my Confessional Revision, in which I shall petition, based on exactly the quality of Christian morality now raising its wings over Washington, that Religion be replaced with Laughter), proclaimed to house "the Tombs and Sepulchers of God." Sometime St. Eliot, whose halo was reportedly Green, argues significantly, in his meditation on the Commedia, that the Amor of passion hurling Paolo and Francesca on the darkened winds of Inferno was, after all, *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle* ("the Love that moves the sun and other stars") of Paradiso. Now, however, we have entered a New Spiritual Geography. So I offer you, my Cartographer Omniscient, my own little sketch of our national psyche whose souls are so much at war. We begin at the Summit of a new American (I pray not World) Order atop which sits Disney's Utopian Community where Ike still reigns:

CELEBRATION

HEAVEN = KINGDOM OF MAGIC

PURGATORY = INTERSTATE 75 etc. (7 Levels)

HELL

Limbo: Washing-Ton DC

The Treacherous

The Violent

The Lustful

Those who cannot live within the idyllic and Animated yet Bodiless love of the Goddess, Tinker Bell, are hurled down the Interstate to Limbo, as You once Hurlled Satan, my Sling, where they may serve their time as Public Officials, though closer to the Exit and so ever nearby the Return to the Kingdom. The Goddess of Disney may serve in the place of Boethius' Lady Philosophy, as of Dante's Love, and so have the pleasure of denouncing the Theatrical Harlotry Below, whose stage is Washington and whose stage mechanics are run by the hierarchy of Hell: the technicians of Treachery, Violence and Lust. The script for the current Morality Play is that Virtue, Played by Starr, reveals Mankind, Clinton, to have been led astray by Vice, Monica, and so the Sinner is to be turned over to the Assassins of Character, the Press, and relegated, given the quality of his sin, to the lowest order of Desolation: the Lustful. This will preclude his ever being admitted to the company of the Elect (Mouseketeers, who are mostly Republicans anyway), though he may be given a Pardon if he is purified through vast Capital Accumulation gathered from his memoirs of Baptism in Whitewater and Love in the White House, both of which are hallowed by their absence of Color, and so be granted a Lot, beyond Lethe the River of Forgetfulness, in that celebratory city, the new Elysium once Envisioned by Aeneas and then reenvisioned by Dante as Paradise. In the interim, while he writes, the Departed Democratic Soul will be allowed the excellent company of Presidents past who may offer him some salient details of their Own to embellish his story. Back Above in Washing-Ton, meanwhile, the Shade of Nixon will walk

miraculously out of the Tomb to reinvest our Polis with a Sin more Respectable: then Treachery will reign into the new Millennium. Luckily, Lord, I am situated in the Angelic Real estate of Suburbia, not far from Paradise, polishing my own halo and awaiting Promotion, so I may join the Elect and the Forgiven in the limit of American Dreams: Celebration.

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