

HISTORY

To the ignorant and the wise,
the fucking thing is over,
It was over after the Shoah,
It was done after Vietnam,
There is no such thing.
It's fucking over, it
Never began, it was always
A mad dog killer
On the loose,
Man
The Species defiling his
Way across the Earth.

That's what I think,
And fuck you if you
Don't like it, Christian
And Jew alike,
Those of you who want
To forget about it
And be happy till
The End of Days.
It was always over,
It never began,
Just the triumph
Of an evil seed
In Man.
God had Nothing
To do with it and there
Is no such thing as Choice,
Or Free Will,
It's a joke
You don't laugh at --

You cry and have
Bad Dreams,
Dreams that have nothing to
Do with you,
They could be
From another person,
Or from
The atmosphere itself,
The viral spookiness of
Life
On Earth, this spinning ball

Of molten iron and a crust
With organisms crawling around
On it,
what the fuck?
Why the impossible dreams?
Dreams that are not you,
Dreams that have nothing to do
With you,
Dreams about horror,
Images of horror, night
Thoughts in the body
Mangled
And mangling like twisted insects,
Foreign in my own mind, myself.
My so-called Self.
I have no idea
Why.

And then I think,
I begin
To think,
Again and again,
About the moral nature of
Man,
If there is such a thing,
Or why I try, in the face
Of Damned reality to uphold
An honorable existence
And even to suffer my faults
And failures and fuck-ups
Over a lifetime --
I'm grateful
For all my lives and everything
That happened,
But it ain't so
I'm optimistic.
Forget about that.
I am not.
I think things are bad.

The Question of God comes up.
Always and always.
God, God, God.
Allah, Adonoi, Christ. Allah,
Yahweh, what the fuck?
Billions of Believers

And they'll kill for their beliefs.
 There's no free choice far
 As I can see, none.
 Murder,
 Endless murder, and then
 Go home to your family
 And Sleep, the sleep of the Killer
 Organism, he has survived
 Another day, another Crime,
 He has something to eat,
 Something to look forward to.
 What else?
 His wife loves him
 And he can fuck her in the night
 When her guard is down.
 And she?
 What can I say about Her?
 She got no excuse no more,
 No more excuses,
 She got to name
 Names and call all this shit out
 But it ain't gonna happen.
 Not in my lifetime.

I see them in the crowds,
 The Base,
 Cheering and waving these assholes
 On,
 Preaching and praying and
 Demagoguing for the Armegeddon
 And the Rapture,
 An unbelievable
 Fantasy harboring in Human
 American brains,
 Like a virus
 Or a Cancer, it's more than
 I can take,
 Yet I sit here and go
 On with my life, writing this,
 As though it were a kind of Hope.

No. I want to
 Experience myself as I am,
 And this is who I am, if the question
 Has any meaning at all, which it
 Probably doesn't at all, it's just

What I do to get through the day.

Not Hope.

And why this form, this
 Running down the page,
 Prose in the form of Poetics?
 I like the way it runs down
 The sheet like a spoken river,
 Or a fountain – a certain rhythm
 And occasional inner rhyming
 When it ought to be strict
 Meter and a count and a format,
 I wanna be free as the saying
 Goes but on the other hand
 It's definitely cheating and
 On the other hand I have a lot
 To say, so much going on in my
 Suffering head, I can barely keep
 Up with it, I have to get it out
 Like this.

So much to remember, so much
 To observe, without being fancy
 Or obedient – it's the literary life
 After all, what I wanted, what I
 Believed in, thank God, so there you
 Have it -- I have it, too, *GOD* again,
 An obligation
 To do your best
 With what you got.
 It's also the Jew in me,
 The old books,
 The obligatories and the Laws,
 The Holocaust and the Pogroms,
 The history of Man,
 The hatred
 And resentment and envy in the soil
 Of the planet,
 The so-called fucking
 History of evolution gone to its
 Inevitable conclusion in a final
 Genocide.
 The absolute Fucking End.

But I'm still writing this.

Someting I have to do.
 I have to do something.
 Something has to be done.
 Something is actually happening
 As I sit here doing this – Time
 Passing, Death coming, and you, too,
 My friend,
 The same.

Friends. I have very few friends.
 I'm supposed to be calling people,
 But I don't, who to call?,
 Happy day, happy days,
 Beckett again, Fourth of July,
 What a scam, so I don't.
 Maybe I won't, maybe later.
 The American Herd
 Gets up on its hind legs
 And hollers for the murder
 Of the – you know who –
 And soon enough it'll be us,
 The Jew.

So. I like that word and use it
 A lot – it's sense of past and future
 Coming together like a
 Thud.
 Conscience is involved,
 Conscience and consequence,
 The inevitable sorrow
 Of manifestation, of action.
 Of course, that sounds just like
Murray, me, talking.
 Who is nothing
 But what you're reading now,
 Who will disappear like the dust
 Of the Bible, *dust to dust*.
 Can't see it now, not quite, one's
 Attention is occupied by Thought
 Or what passes for Thought.

Now I have a glimpse of myself
 As I am.
 An old man in a bathrobe
 Tapping on a machine.
C'est la vie, as I like to say.

Or used to say.
 I'm so fond of the French
 For no fuckiing reason.
 I went to Paris and walked the Seine.
 Walked and walked. Profoundly
 Alone. *So. Alonzi.*

Maybe, beside the bread,
 I liked
 The Women of France, or I made that up
 For myself as a reason to love France.
 Which brings me to the History
 Of the women I've loved, something
 I've only touched on in my work
 Or in therapy, on and off,
 But little.
 I don't understand much about it.
 (What I see now about running
 Down the page, is: you can alter
 The diction, the syntax, the Look,
 Play with it.
 But why should I tell you?
 I really don't much
 Care anymore what people
 Think.
 A benefit of Work
 And Age.)
 Anyway,
 It all started, as with all of us,
 In childhood.

I don't know if I want to get into it.
 I've been remembering Zoe,
 In Santa Fe,
 Who blessed me with her
 Honest touch;
 Elaine, in Brooklyn,
 Karen on the Lower East Side,
 Karen in the Catskills,
 Louellen on the Farm
 Who blew my mind,
 Nancy in LaVerne,
 California,
 Diane in Philadelphia, her silky skin,
 Joelle, in Brooklyn, a sense of loss,
 Mary, downstairs on East Ninth

And Avenue D.
 A prostitute who liked me,
 I'm so forgetful,
 I'm so glad I can
 Remember, but what is it I need to know?
 I'm grateful,
 I can tell you that,
 A little guy with a nice face and talent.
 Maybe talent.
 You never know, *never*
Know. I was mainly passive, but not always.
 Janice in San Diego. Judith in Manhattan.
Good grief.

Flooded now with anxiety
 Knowing the jealousy or simple
 Hatred of former friends.
 I'm not getting into that either.
A life in the Theatre.
 As the saying goes.
 I'm always happy there.
 All the other stuff goes away.
 The anxiety, the inferiority,
 The competition, the opinions,
 The whole fucking ball of wax,
 Reminds me now that I was a pretty
 Aggressive athlete as a kid
 And it's in there somewhere,
 Just un-recognized.

Self-observation
 And Self-remembering
 Are the same – you can't have one
 Without the other,
 Far as I can see,
 They are entwined like tree branches
 The trunk and the soil – I see how
 I want to dream myself
 Into existence, or write myself
 Into Being, when I actually know
 The Score, so to speak, as they say,
 It's one to nothing, One to
 Nothing,
 And that's the score.

Remembering Dick McGuire

Of the NY Knicks, Dolph Shayes
 With his one-handed set shot
 The Syracuse Nationals,
 The jump-shot hadn't been invented yet.
 And still I yearn for the Dave Debushere
 Days, the Glory years of '70 - 73
 Like an eleven year-old
 Kid.

No shame on me. I won't allow it
 No more, it's fucking uncanny
 The way
 I remember all the therapy now
 And so much appreciate it.
 Jerry Rochman was right about everything
 And I even knew it at the time
 But I know it much better now,
 I hope he's alive and well.
 What a thought!
 I feel like I'm writing
 In my own voice,
 And I'm afraid I'll
 Jinks it
 By talking about it.

Anything goes in America,
 An almost perfect dactylic line --
 Happens to be true,
 An idiots delight,
 Land of the Free
 And Home of the Brave.
 Firecrackers and cherry bombs
 Galore in the middle of the night
 For no fucking reason
 That I can see -
 I am not an
 American -- a second generation
 Jewish intellectual
 Immigrant - scorned --
 What are these people thinking?
 I don't get it,
 I can't figure it out.
 The envy of the stupid.
 Revenge of the dummies.
 You could tell in the third grade
 For Crime out loud!

Those dirty mindless kids
 Thirsting to get even
 I remember one kid's name –
 Reuben Gibson, who tormented me
 Day in and day out until I punched him
 In the mouth in front of the Principal.
 Mr. Bloomberg.
 I wonder where he is now.
 Reuben.
 I could have killed the sonofabitch.

And then there was Rochmelowitz,
 Son of a Jewish hoodlum
 In the City
 Who kept slapping me in the back of the head.
 I punched him too somewhere and somehow
 And I'd do it again in a NY minute.

Violent and sadistic teenagers running around
 Throwing rocks and bottles
 And torturing the younger kids for fun.
 Holidays came and gone
 Jewish and American
 I liked the Jewish ones the best
 Even though, even though,
 What the fuck. What can I say?
 I couldn't keep up.

Nobody talked about the murder of the Jews.
 Something disgraceful,
 Distasteful,
 Dishonored,
 Hanging in the air like a disease,
 Something to be avoided,
 Supressed into subtext,
 The breaking of Taboos,
 My first love,
 Marty's mother
 Rose,
 Ambitious,
 A German beauty, blue eyes
 Black hair,
 Shining,
 I was nine years old
 Hanging around for food.
 Smitten.

Who was I then?
 Who?
 I feel the same.
 It doesn't matter.
 But the memories must count.
 They must count for something.
 If only now, this.
 She was a beauty in a black coat,
 A survivor
 Who found me by the railroad tracks.
 In a Tourist village
 In the Catskills
 In 1948
 To play with her little boy.

History.
 Remembering and forgetting.
 I can see now the roots of
 Loneliness and isolation,
 Walking those hated streets
 A hunter/gatherer.
 I'm ashamed even now,
 I'm him for a second
 A millisecond
 A hungry kid who wouldn't go home
 If he could help it.
 Feeling like a piece of shit.

Where's the smart guy,
 The hipster?
 He's in me now for sure.
 I welcome him.
 I am him.
 Good for him.
 Praise the motherfucker.
 Applause.
 Acceptance.
 Relief.
 Was he there, then,
 In that shithole of a town?

He must have been.
 He 's me.
N'est pa?
 Working the hotels, the bars, the luncheonettes

Without end, on and on
 Throwing food around to people.
 Gives you a certain attitude.
 A hostile silent wariness,
 A willingness to dance
 And serve
 With his pride intact.
 Prick him and he'll bite.
 But he's a good-looking kid
 And quick.

Half of what he earned, tips, tips,
 TIPS. Unfucking believable. TIPS.
 He gave to his Mother.
 Why?
 I don't know why.
 A nice Jewish boy.
 35 bucks a month he gave,
 30 or 40 years
 Only God knows how long
 The same fucking letter
 Verbatim
 I refuse to say it here
 Though I knew it by heart
 The same fucking letter
 Every month
 And I sent her the fucking money.

Betty. I don't know what to say
 Anymore.
 Maybe immortalize her.
 The *Beryl of 16 Routines*,
Betty of Joe and Betty.
 Good, if it lasts.
 I want to forgive her for everything,
 And I actually do when
You come right down to it.
What are you going to do?
Que vas hacer?
Qu'est ce que tu vas faire?
 She became a *grotesque*,
 I have a photo,
 She and my uncle Martin,
 Destroyed
 While living,
 Impaled on an inner burning stake by life,

Institutionalized.
And I'm a part of that.
Holy shit.
I called the shots.
The shock treatments that led
Eventually
Lobotomy.
What the fuck.

It was me who signed the papers,
Betty's,
My father was in jail,
That's how I remember it
True or not.
Martin had been taken away
Screaming
In an ambulance as a teenager
Supposedly a mathematical
Genius.
My Grandmother,
Rifka,
A hitter,
Was out of her mind.

So much for that.
Too much of that.
I should talk about Sol,
My actual father, though
He's always in a movie,
One he's in,
The one in his head,
And the one I imagine,
Now a dead man in the Jewish Cemetery
In Glen Wild
New York
Along with my mother
My brother,
My sister,
My Grandparents,
Louis and Celia,
All dead there in a grove,
Overgrown and wild.

I won't end up there with them,
I'm an L.A. guy now,
A Valley guy, who'd a thought.

A New York Jew
 In Valley Village,
 California.
 They'll bury me around here somewhere.
 I'm writing my obituary
 Every day, it's an obsession.
C'est la.

Back to my father, Sol,
 Who fell off a building in Brooklyn
 And broke his head.
 We come from peasantry,
 Working class.
 Strong arms, strong hands,
 Sex heads,
 Stricken
 For generations
 Being poor, seizing advantages,
 Pleasure being an attribute
 Of Paradise --
 They seemed to know that well,
 My grandfather and his sons,
 Including my father, Sol.

He's a fucking unknown to me
 Because his brain was gone,
 Bled out into the street
 Where he fell hard
 And never went to school again
 Or read a book.
 Far as I know.
Matinee Joe.
 I'm frightened to go there,
 Frozen in front of this machine,
 Mistake after mistake,
 An old man.
 Where was I then,
 Buying pepsis and pretzels and cigars
 And Pall Malls
 For him,
 And stealing money from the Slaters
 Next door to the movie?

It was me,
 I can almost taste it.
 Not that I haven't dealt with this before,

I have, but the motherfucker
 Had no clue. Fathers fuck their daughters
 In America
 All over the fucking joint,
 America the beautiful,
 People, girls, disappear into the shrubby shithole.
 The sandy, rocky, poisoned, pissed-on
 Piece of shit we throw cherry bombs around
 For.
 The stupid and deluded,
 The self-loving, vain, fat, ugly, drunk,
 Justifying, two-legged assholes
 Who are my fucking EQUALS.
 Reminds me of Mussolini, the argument
 For Fascism, let the bigots and the small-minded
 Have their day, and run the country.
 History. People don't realize.
 They want to feel superior
 And eat apple pie and ice cream and Dick and Jane
 And all that other Americana
 Bullshit.
 I could throw up.
 But not today.

Now I'm on it.

I was not into it.
 Six years old Dick and Jane --
 Something disturbing
 I didn't fit that picture
 Looking out the window
 Trees and grass
 Buildings I would know
 Intimately
 Eleven years in the Catskills
 A fucking harrow show.

So. I meant to say Horror.
 Show. Sol dies up there in denial,
 Denial of the real world
 Exchanged for a fantasy of marital achievement
 A movie,
 And the American Nightmare.
 That was *me* waving a stupid
 Good-bye
 In Woodburne, New York

While his crazy wife Mary
 Watched from a window
 Steeped in psychopathic poverty
 Like the rest of the country --
 Spitting and cursing Evangelicals,
 Delusional,
 Armed to the teeth
 And Paranoid.
 Not my father, though,
 Had a good nature
 And liked to work
 Died two weeks later.
 No clue.

(Fucking scammers and liars
 All over the fucking place
 Was ever so.)

While Sol believed in Movies.
 Movies.
 Sol believed in movies.
 Movies were real,
 More real than actual life.
 He was in a movie
 Mahwah prison
 Three years.
 They let him out to an institution
 Where he met his wife
 And they retired to Woodburne,
 New York,
 Like an ordinary couple,
 God bless 'em.
 Looking though the window,
 Living on the State.

He was in there
 Because of Child Molestation
 And that's where I have trouble.
 I have trouble with all that.
 Don't talk about it.
 It's a movie.
 It's only a movie,
 A picture in the mind.
 My mind.
 My own fucking mind.
 I can't deal with it,

And nobody else can
Either.

It's a moral question
Almost,
A moral question to talk like this
Or not.
Putting down the Human Race,
Acting with attitude,
Morally superior,
It's a question.

But there is a reason for Literature,
There is a Reason
And an obligation,
You could say it comes from Above,
From *GOD*, God again,
Or the Energy of the Universe
However you want to put it
Something about the meaning
Of Life
On Earth,
A reflection. Or a mirror,
Or the upholding of an
Ancient Law,
A Duty.

Why the Work,
The suffering and sorrow --
Work on oneself,
Never ending
Plus the Joy of Being
Once in a while
Depending
On only God knows
What,
The Same,
A Law and a Duty.

But how to live with the swank
Criminality
Of life in America?
Helpless in the face of the shitheads.
The moneyed class,
The celebrity manure,
A horror.

Merde.

How they live, what they think.
 It's disgusting, the word I'm
 Looking for,
 Disgusting and disappointing
 And enraging,
 We got what we deserved,
 My friend,
 As a Nation.
C'est la.

As though that would take care of it.

That's it.

And who is the *friend* I'm talking to?
 It's myself.
 The same kid walking depressed
 Around town and city
 In search of recognition and love
 And the exercise of talent.
 Ectastic relief playing ball,
 Isolated,
 In his head,
 Not realizing,
 Blindly egoistic,
 Faking it all the way,
 Miraculously getting work done,
 Junkiedom,
 Kicking methadone,
 Surviving to California.

Selah, in the Bible.

Amen.

But I'm not done yet.
 Something more to say, or confess.
 This experiment of Words on the page
 Is not done:
 Brooklyn College,
 How, an honors student,
 I couldn't make the 9 0 clock
 Geology class,
 Rockaway to Atlantic Avenue to the
 Flatbush Line,
 Out of money,
 Gittel Kanterman on Belmont Ave.

Brownsville, birthplace of Bugsy,
That dark, lonely room,
Dark furniture and a television,
The Loewe's Pitkin,
I ran away
To Miami Beach,
A kosher hotel,
The Alamac,
A busboy
On Ocean Avenue.
And now here I am
Now
Sixty years later,
in the Valley.

I look at the light, the Valley Summer light,
And I realize – what?
I can hardly say it – the wish for,
The love of,
Being,
Just a moment, a flash, a look.
I feel worthy, should I dare,
As I said before,
I can't keep up,
I'm indebted up to my neck.
Haunted by obligation,
Sober as a rock.
A stream runs through.

Murray Mednick
7/8/20

