

rect quantity of drugs is found—no matter if he can be implicated in the crime. Commercial fishermen have lost their livelihoods when agents found a deckhand with a stash, and one young lady lost her car when her brother, who had borrowed it, was convicted on drug charges. In one recent case in California, government agents inventoried a millionaire's property before breaking in late at night to search the premises for evidence of his wife's assumed drug use. They found nothing, but they did shoot and kill the householder.

I should be the last person to minimize the drug problem in the United States, and I would cheerfully advocate the death penalty for anyone over 21 peddling drugs to anyone under 18, but these cases of government regulators seizing property they have invaded in search of contraband sound all too much like those of the Boston merchants defended by James Otis in 1761.

The most serious attacks on American households have been directed against gunowners. Once again, privacy is invaded and property is seized on the claim that a regulation has been violated or that a form has not been filled out, a tax paid. In many cases, it turns out, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms has made a mistake. In Colville, Washington, ATF agents, acting on the accusation of a certifiably insane informant, burst in upon a mother of a 21-month-old child she had been bathing and would not even allow her to rescue the child from the bathtub. But the perils of such wrongfully accused gunowners, though real, are nothing compared to the trials of Randy Weaver's wife and son and David Koresh's followers, all killed because of alleged infractions of firearms regulations. In both cases the ATF agents were acting on improper warrants; in both cases they shot first and reserved their questions until after the funerals.

Many Americans are unhappy with the violence that has

been perpetrated recently by federal agents, but because of ignorance or cowardice they cannot make the connection with the train of abuses that led to the independence of the United States. We have a Congress filled with members of two parties who prattle on merrily about our rights and liberties under democracy, and the President himself was blowing smoke just the other day, when "Lady Liberty" was restored to her place atop the Capitol. But America is no longer either the Land of the Free or the Home of the Brave. If it were, the federal government's outrages and usurpations would have provoked rebellion years ago. But Natty Bumppo is no longer a hero, and we would laugh at a man who burned down his own house, unless it was to get the insurance money. After all, in a democracy, we have the freedom to enslave our neighbors. Who could ask for more?

So long as we worship the gilded statue of democracy, we can never be free. As James Fenimore Cooper realized, democracies were more likely to repress individuality than monarchies. The danger lay in the temptation to see majority rule as the bastion of liberty: "Numbers, however, may oppress as well as one or a few, and when such oppression occurs, it is usually of the worst character. The habit of seeing the publick rule, is gradually accustoming the American mind to an interference with private rights that is slowly undermining the individuality of the American character."

The erosion of character on which Cooper remarked has gone so far as to make us incapable of individual liberty, but our servility has not bought us safety—it hardly ever does. Instead, we are ever more exposed, in our homes, our businesses, and our automobiles, to the "petty revenue officers" of an empire that seems all too willing to offer us Patrick Henry's choice of liberty or death.

<C

---

## Albae Meditatio

by Peter Russell

Already it's getting light and the first birds  
Are twittering in the walnut tree, and you  
Are hidden everywhere from my fallacious eye.  
Some of the pale green leaves at this hour  
Appear bright yellow, smooth grey of the walnut bark  
Jet like the young girl's cable braids swinging like bell ropes.

There is a mirror you cannot see and a rose in it.  
Sun is already up behind the trees,  
But the moon, lemon-coloured, lingers reluctant  
Like the windhover before he drops. Everywhere you,  
Body and spirit, screened by each ovate leaf. What should I  
say?  
Green leaves, running water, a beautiful face. It is permitted  
To love these things with a passion pure but intense?  
The young boy with his cap awry passes  
With his fishing-rod and his wicker basket.  
But what is it between my eye and the passing of Beauty?  
The prism of air and the sun's transparent light  
Bend in perpetual duel the living rods.  
Wherever Beauty is revealed, there out of necessity

Love must grow. Why should today  
Be an exception? Love is its own reality.  
A metaphor is a bridge to reality. Surely  
A single thought of that Beauty is a ladder  
To higher branches. I am a straw to Love's amber,  
And willing to be tossed to and fro on the wind  
Of whatever makes for cohesion in our mutable world.  
Running water, green leaves, reflections,  
A beautiful face. The weir and the waterfall.

Love is a medicine that makes pains into cures,  
But there are people who think that Love is a mere illusion,  
Like physicians and vendors of money and weapons  
And the learned in universities and the assessors of culture.  
Stone, if you wish, is bread, is living flesh,  
And the rough wine of the country is Love himself.  
There is no sweeter poison to drink than Love,  
No sickness more bracing than this sickness of Love.  
Love is the cat o' nine tails that strips off the skin,  
Implanting a coat of many colors where before  
There was only a grey epidemic of scale and scab.

Love is the fire that burns all deadness away.  
A ferocious burnishing that leaves only light to the eye.

A voice from the forest, the pheasant's cry,  
A cry from the waters' depths, a woman's cry,  
But it is not a woman. It is the cry of Love himself.

Her very veils are Revelation itself,  
Her black tresses, yes, conceal the mole in her white neck,  
But they display oceans of shining darkness.

Out of the blackness of the pool spreads the image of her  
face.  
Do not touch it, or it will disappear.  
As you look in the pool, you look in the rose.  
In the center that is yellow, a sea of light.  
A vision of clouds and roses, the clouds themselves are roses,  
The roses themselves are light, the light is clouds,  
Clouds eternally moving in the still mirror of the sky,  
And the Empyrean is intense motion, utterly at rest.

The call of a dove, it is the call of a woman  
Who is not a woman, the woman calling her lover.  
On that same path, for love of a Christian girl,  
The pious Sheik took to herding her swine.

What is the world without longing, without desire?  
Without desire, neither a man nor the nightingale can sing,  
Nor can the rose bloom or her petal blow on the wind.  
The Sheik has broken his pens in bewilderment,  
The pious girl has given succour to an Infidel.

The air is an oil of roses distilled in the dew of dawn.  
It burns with a light blue flame, silent as moonlight.  
The sounds of the goldsmiths' hammering in the bazaar,  
The sound of the watermills in the Garden of Meram,  
The playing of the children in the square, the silence of  
deserts.  
The voices of space, and the spaces between the voices,  
The tongues of the moods, of wind and earth, of fire and sea,  
Of running waters, the yearning of all creatures for home.  
It is pure, but not like water; subtle, but not like air;  
Luminous, but not like fire. Spirit it is, that never knew  
body.

That Wine never dwelt with Care, that Sorrow never with  
Song.

Joyless he is who lives sober, he that does not die drunk,  
Let him weep, for he will lose the way towards wisdom.  
Be thinking of beautiful things that neither age nor winters  
Change. Listen to a thousand tongues reciting before thee.  
And as for the lays of old time, a thousand have been  
scattered

On the wind, a thousand buried in the snow.  
These the Teutonic Knights trampled with heavy boots,  
Those the spells of maleficent priests rooted out.  
There are a thousand tongues in the wood, a thousand  
tongues in the sky,  
In the running brook; in the deep lake a thousand more.  
The states of mind of the gnostic seek out and find  
These thousands of tongues, unforgetting, and thousands  
more.

I shall pursue the woman to the new pastures where rain has

fallen,  
And the thorn-bushes are green and the small bird sings.  
Meanwhile the mill-wheel turns and the noise of the  
children in the square  
Reverberates clearly, though the City is three hundred miles  
out of earshot.

It is the silence of these sounds that knits my mind,  
And the roar of many waters in the night refreshes me.  
A constant sound, more various than many words  
Of maenads, maniacs, mystics—all the sober Bards.  
Erôs is everywhere, and everywhere Eris  
Throws Love's pure harmonies into the jangle of the street,  
Chaos of market-place and battleground, the jangle of the  
world.

Rapture itself calls out in rut for cleaving rupture,  
Still ocean cloven silently by the immense waves.  
Moses with his rod slew the Pharaoh of worldly existence,  
The Muses gave Hesiod their wand and he harmonized  
worlds,  
Singing of generations of Gods he welded in one the  
saeculum.

Somnûn the lover said that you cannot define anything.  
Unless in terms more subtle than that thing  
There is nothing more subtle than that thing.  
There is nothing subtler than Love. How shall it be  
explained?

The rational interpreter is like the donkey carrying books.  
He brays loud, but nothing unclouds the lover's furrowed  
brow.

And I ask what Kant ever said about Love, or Hegel,  
Contradicting his contradictions, about the eye of the  
Beloved?

Thinking of the Muses, envious of the love-crazed mystics,  
I am Drosophila in the harvester's web.

In that mysterious solitude when she unveils herself  
When no more thought of battling self-regard,  
The sentinel on the lip, the watcher in the heart,  
Persisted in their censorship, I said to Her:  
Separation has been hard; in this proximity  
Naked beholding alone divides.  
Dart now on me that glance, like one who looks on a lover  
Before Love blinds him to himself and all appearances,  
And body vanishes in Love's effulgence. Say:  
"Thou shalt not!" Others before me have heard this  
commandment

And known increase of love. Can man ask more  
Than once united with thee he no more needs to see.  
This mystics call, in the anguish of their love  
And stark clairvoyance, the Second Separation.  
The mountains crumble, even Sinai is laid low,  
And words fail utterly in the darkness of this joy.  
"O fire of the burning furnace, be coolness and peace!"

And what is Death, the dissolution of the body,  
A fair young woman who well knows how to treat  
Dissolute bodies. Let her come with her seductions,  
Showing her nakedness, irresistibly dissimulating  
The wanton harlot. Welcome, O harlot! Welcome!  
O holy saeculum, and O unholy heavens,  
Open with all your awful revelations!  
I am here.

# Treat Them to a Good Dose of Lead

by Roger D. McGrath



Anna Myreck-Wodecki

While working my way through traffic snarls on the freeways of Los Angeles I listened intently to a radio talk show. When a caller urged that all citizens should go about armed, the program host exclaimed, “My God, that would be like the Old West. We can’t go back to that.” The host obviously thought that by invoking the image of the Old West he had made a damning argument against gun-toting. It was the umpteenth time I had heard such a response to a proponent of an armed citizenry. Yet the facts of frontier life suggest that the Old West had far less crime and far fewer innocent victims than America has today, and that the young, the old, and the female—those most vulnerable—were far safer in the most wild and woolly frontier towns than they are in any American city today. We could do worse than return to the standards and values of the Old West.

Two frontier towns with widespread reputations for violence were the mining camps of Aurora, Nevada, and Bodie, California. In their heydays, 1861-1865 for Aurora and 1878-1882 for Bodie, they each boasted populations that exceeded 5,000, were alive 24 hours a day, contained dozens of saloons and brothels, and produced gold and silver bullion worth a billion in today’s dollars. The economies were boom and bust, with new veins being discovered and old ones being pinched out. The populations were transient, half were foreign born, and men outnumbered women ten to one. The people were adventurous, entrepreneurial, brave, young, unmarried, intemperate, and armed. A few had struck it rich, but most had not.

*Roger D. McGrath is a professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the author, among other works, of Gunfighters, Highwaymen & Vigilantes (1984).*

All the ingredients were there for an epidemic of crime, but none occurred. An examination of robbery, burglary, theft, rape, and homicide in Aurora and Bodie reveals not how far we have come but how far we have sunk.

While robbery occurs with alarming frequency in American cities today, only rarely was a resident of Aurora or Bodie robbed. During the boom years there were fewer than 20 robberies of individual citizens in the towns. The stagecoach was targeted more often, suffering a couple dozen robberies. When highwaymen stopped a stage, they nearly always took only the express box and left the passengers untouched. Passengers frequently remarked that they had been treated courteously by road agents. Only twice were passengers robbed. In the first instance, the highwaymen later apologized for their conduct; in the second, the robbers were drunk. Highwaymen understood that they could take the express box and not arouse the general populace, but if they insulted or robbed passengers they would precipitate a vigilante reaction.

If the passengers were not the target of highwaymen, neither were stagecoaches carrying the great bullion shipments. With shipments worth millions in today’s dollars, they would seem inviting targets. Yet not one was ever attacked. Unlike the regular stages, the bullion coaches were guarded by two, and often three or four, rifle- and shotgun-wielding marksmen. Road agents preferred to prey on the unguarded coaches, take whatever was in the express box, and escape with their health intact. Only once did highwaymen and guards exchange gunfire, and on that occasion the road agents had not expected to encounter any guards. The miscalculation cost one of the highwaymen his life. For similar reasons none of the several banks that operated in Aurora or Bodie ever experienced a robbery.