



Kirpal Gordon, Sweet Basil, 2008

The Bee-Loud Glade

Kirpal Gordon Interviewed by Randy Roark, July 2014

Introduction

I don't believe Kirpal and I have ever met. But we may have as we know a lot of the same people, and have even lived in the same places, although not at the same time. I think he may be a few years older than I am (I'm 60). He lives in Flushing, New York, where he makes ends meet as a fiction writer, teacher, ghostwriter, editor, and spoken-word performer.

Steven Hirsch—a mutual friend—published him under the Heaven Bone Press imprint years ago, so I knew his name. And everyone I knew seemed to consider him a close friend. When I mentioned that we had begun a correspondence to Jim Cohn (founder of the Museum of American Poetics), he told me that Kirpal was the only contemporary fiction writer that he continued to read.

But if I had met Kirpal, I think I would remember because he seems hard to forget. He is perhaps the most alive person I have ever known. And genuinely alive, over sustained periods of time, and even under pressure. Kirpal has more energy and it's a higher octane energy than I have. He is fire, and to be completely honest I find fire a little frightening. I can't remember what started our correspondence, but I do remember that it very quickly became thick with overlapping conversations and multiple layers of ideas and references.

Shortly after we began our correspondence, as I was about to take off for an extended trip down the Amazon, I chose to use three of my fifty-pound allotment for three of Kirpal's books and a CD. About three weeks later, I was in Cuzco, and had thirty minutes before I was to meet someone for dinner, so I pulled out his collection of short stories and paged through it. Thirty minutes should be plenty to read the first story, maybe two.

From the very beginning of *New York at Twilight*, almost every narrator is determinedly not the author. And, in a rather overly dramatic instance of kismet, I picked the book up immediately after turning off a BBC World News interview with a young male Asian actor. And if you saw the interview, you'd know I haven't learned anything if I'm continuing to use "Asian" as an adjective on par with "young" and "male." And, for that matter, maybe I shouldn't be using adjectives like "young" and "male" either.

This actor was born and raised in London and was more British than Asian, and had much more in common with the thoughts and dreams and emotions of any male character onstage in London than anyone genuinely "Asian"—whatever that means. And yet, even with such a large number of second and even third generation Asians in London, there were never any parts for him onstage other than those specifically calling for someone often without even a name, a sort of human cypher for "male Asian youth." He even had to hire voice coaches if the director thought he was having trouble saying the lines written for him by a non-Asian "in character."

The play he was promoting in the interview takes place during a casting call for “Lady Saigon.” “Lady Saigon” is somewhat notorious for having non-Asians play all the Asian characters, necessitating voice lessons, a choreographer to get the walk and body language cliché enough, and many additional hours of make-up every day for a mediocre result, but it was what was necessary to please the modern Broadway audience. But that was the irony of an “Asian” actor’s career: when there finally were *desirable* roles for a large number of Vietnamese on a Broadway stage, no Asian actor would even be considered for the part.

So, there will probably never be a reader more skeptical of a writer writing *en voce* than I was at the moment I opened *New York at Twilight*, which turned out not surprisingly to be a collection of short stories centered in New York City. But I was surprised when the first story was a highly charged sexual adventure narrated from a young woman’s point of view. What does he mean, I thought (a student of feminist and post-feminist criticism) by writing in a woman’s voice? Then the collection continues to portray the city’s varied ethnic mix, in both male and female voices. In most cases they narrate their peculiar story very quickly in the present tense in a believable and enjoyable (if sometimes unlikely) selfawareness. Others exhibit a just as believable and enjoyable (if equally unlikely) complete lack of selfawareness. Both talk as if they are in rush to get everything out before they run out of time in the last paragraph before all of that scary white space.

As I continued to read deeper into the book, following its complexities, marking his connections and making my own, I found that I was also reading with two different antennae—one wondering how he was going to maintain the manic level of energy until the last word (he did), and the other wondering if he would ever slip into pantomime or cliché, into repetition or lack of inventiveness (never). Instead, the author seems not only to unquestionably accept each of his characters, but he also seems to be genuinely charmed by his own creations and wants very much for you to like them too. One suspects that several of these characters might be driven by un-lived desires in the author’s own chest. But if that’s the case, what he wanted was to live in the skin of these characters—even the ones who will be just as surprised as you are by the last sentence in their very short life stories, but only for the length of a short story.

There are pros and cons of being a writer reading another’s work. The con part is that reading quickly devolves from a suspension of disbelief into a kind of technical exercise—as if you’re workshopping the piece, editing it, evaluating the rightness of its choices. But the pro part is you can really enjoy the skill and appreciate the genuine talents when they’re present.

Kirpal’s skill begins with what he leaves out. No establishing shot, each story starts not only in *media res* but as if you’ve been accosted by someone who’s chosen to relate their manic variation on their life-changing event to *you*. Kirpal also knows a lot and I admire

the ways he's found to insert a lot of esoterica into stories that still remain believably *verite*. He also writes directly to the audience, the way people really talk, although to call these characters "talkers" is disrespectful of their extensive verbal skills. And he doesn't explain himself—it's up to you whether you get it or not, it's not his concern. It's like Frank O'Hara said in the introduction to his selected poems (I'll have to paraphrase). That if you are accosted on the street, you do not craft a sentence that contextualizes the situation and explains the significance of what you are saying. You yell "Help." All of Kirpal's narrators are in one way or another yelling "Help!"

I also wanted to ask him about his book *Eros in Sanskrit*, and *Speak-Spake-Spoke*, a CD which contains recordings of the contents of the book. I wanted to know if I should consider the book the printed lyrics of performances on the CD, or is the CD a performance of the book? Or something else?

I also wanted to ask him about what I considered to be his use of a double narrative, not only in the stories collected in *New York at Twilight*, but also in his novel *Round Earth, Open Sky* (whose first-person voices include those of Native Americans—both male and female). Each of these books also finds ways to include a multitude of references to largely esoteric spiritual teachings. And his latest novel—*Go Ride the Music*—is told mostly in the voice of a young woman born in East India who is impersonating Billie Holiday, traveling and performing throughout the modern-day south by station wagon to locales important to jazz and modern literary history (largely African-American). In it Kirpal exhibits a deep knowledge of various musical cultures throughout history from around the world, and a great deal of knowledge—and deeper feelings—about American avant garde jazz and musicians in general.

If I was right about the double narrative thing, then we were more similar than we looked to be on paper. From the outside, we are complete opposites. He shines in works of imaginative fiction, and I write only creative non-fiction. I strive to write simple, declarative sentences, and Kirpal has developed an idiosyncratic modern epistolary style; a somewhat cryptic but decipherable manipulation of language into a kind of signifying *litterature concrete*. And I've already mentioned the energy thing, and could add that I'm a skittish introvert, and he's like a roman candle in a speedboat. You'll see.

—Randy Roark, Boulder, July 15, 2014

Randy Roark: I'm interested in your collaborations with musicians. How did that get started?

Kirpal Gordon: I had troubles on the home front and spent part of sixth grade in the principal's office. My punishment, to write one or two thousand words on whatever infraction I had committed, was a reward in disguise. After the brief shame of sitting there with Nun Number One, I got lost in the assignment. The solitude and discovery that went into writing had a powerful effect.

Upon making trouble in the eighth grade, my new job became the writing of the school Christmas play with a part for each of my fifty classmates. Although I was only thirteen years old, writing and directing the play, along with the British musical invasion, helped change my teen zeitgeist from *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, the solitary rebel who refuses to play in the system, to the concept of the collective. Even folkie Dylan had a rock band on the AM radio with "Like a Rolling Stone." The older kids on my block who formed a quintet let me hang with them as they played block parties, VFW Halls, sweet sixteens. Covering the Beatles and "La Bamba," they got our parents' gen to frug, twist and "join with da yute." Some of the kids in class also formed a rock band that fall and needed a drummer just as new jack Nathan Chantella arrived, having moved to Whitestone. So I built the play, a musical, around the band's search for Nathan as I sensed that this babe magnet was a secret weapon. "The Little Drummer Boy," a corny von Trapp Christmas carol, had been re-issued and played the holiday airwaves, and as a drummer and singer, Nathan owned the ballad and brought the house

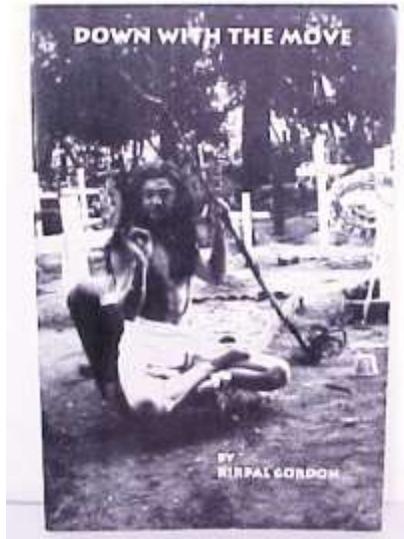
down in every performance. By playing that pa-rum-pum-pum-pum pop-schlock for the adults, we were able to sneak in Beatles' covers, a victory for me to hear rock and blues-based tunes (devil music) in the conservative church basement that had the audience tapping their feet and delivering a standing ovation—a most auspicious beginning.

RR: That experience led to more collaborations?

KG: My interest in the word jumping off the page and onto the stage kept growing. Props to not just the Beats or the Beatles but the gate Whitman opened which swung wider with Langston and Zora; Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Johnny Mercer; Woody, Lead Belly, Pete; Eddie Jefferson, King Pleasure, Jon Hendricks; Jimi Hendrix, Joni Mitchell, Stevie Wonder—all liberating American lyric literature from the lock-jawed and elbow-patched. Amiri Baraka's spoken word solos to jazz really opened up what was possible, especially what he made of Trane's oeuvre. Gil-Scott Heron took the lineage further into popular music. Ditto Bob Marley. 'Twas a time of roots, fusion and hybrid vigor.

That isn't to say I knew what I was doing. While out in Arizona after college graduation I was invited to join the Frequency Media Company, thanks to this intrepid electronic music composer who used tape loops and nature sounds to great effect with contact improvisation and modern dance. A photographer projected his work on a big screen and we built music, spoken word and dance pieces as an ensemble. Although I wasn't thinking about poetry as a career move, only using the facilities at Arizona State University to put up work, Norman Dubie, a poet in the English Department, read some

of my verse and invited me into the graduate creative writing program. I was admitted, but no one there was very familiar with the *New American Poetics* of Don Allen's anthology which was Source One to me at the time. I lucked out and spent that summer of '78 as an apprentice to Allen Ginsberg where I studied the NAP trad up close.



Kirpal, Guadalupe Cemetery, 1978

RR: What made you think of Allen Ginsberg? What was your connection to him?

KG: I was fired as a TA at ASU at the end of the spring semester '78 for using *The New Consciousness*, a reader with Allen Ginsberg's face on the front cover, instead of the freshman writing director's book. Talk about naiveté, I'd just come out of working in a steel mill for two and a half years; I didn't even realize I was kicking against the pricks or that there were such things as po' wars.

I'd read AG in catholic high school. The Q-76 bus I took to get there drove past the scene of his first arrest twenty years earlier (1949), one block south of Northern

Boulevard on Francis Lewis Boulevard. Reading him then I was struck not by his poetry but by the horror of its content: homosexual acts, mother in the madhouse, dope addiction, Moloch eating children. If *Far Out* was the Beat calling card, AG was way further out than anything in Ferlinghetti or Corso or even Kerouac, who'd lived in Ozone Park, not far from where I would teach yoga three years later, and whose work conveyed a Beatific reach a prole jock like me could grok. By contrast, AG's otherness overwhelmed me. He seemed in *Howl* and *Kaddish* suicided by society. It was the activist AG—who appeared before Congress to share his drug experiences, who bashed in veins for peace—who first spoke to me. I was a high-strung stringbean who felt misunderstood by my adoptive parents whose Irish and German families knew no culturati. My bloodlines are Polish and Swedish, peoples I knew nothing about, so I began to search for my own tribe of wordsmiths and sadhus.

My father was opposed to sending me to a “hippie college,” but winning a Regents scholarship gave me the chance to choose my own university program in the state of New York and not get picked off by the draft (I was a conscientious objector prepared to serve in non-combat rather than to go to jail). Before my first week at Fordham U at Lincoln Center was over, students and faculty staged a strike to eliminate required courses, create new departments (African-American, Puerto Rican and Women's Studies) and personal degree programs with full autonomy from Rose Hill in the Bronx (our progressive faculty were the castaways). I expected arrest and fisticuffs which was troubling as I had a rap sheet, but we were given everything we demanded and no one went to the Tombs. Instead, I went to my professors' apartments to contribute ideas to the

Philosophy and Religious Studies Departments. The latter's multiple levels—historical, sociological, psychological, spiritual—were particularly geared for our experimental approach. When the department offered a course on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, we insisted they hire a hatha yoga instructor; when foreign language proficiency became required, my mentor Frank Kenney taught me Sanskrit.

At times the whole city became our classroom as we visited every form of practice and congregation and off-shoot that would have us. NYC was full of Asian culture and we attended music and dance recitals, viewed thangka, yantra and landscape painting exhibits, absorbed D.T. Suzuki's work on Buddhism in the arts (Thomas Merton, too), caught Trungpa's first North American lecture at the Asia Society, brought Dan Berrigan to campus to read, wrote haiku, sang and danced with the Hare Krishnas as well as the Sufis, watched and discussed the films of Ingmar Bergman, prayed with black Baptists, sat awed in tea ceremony, meditated in the New Year with Sri Chinmoy, deconstructed the Hindu Renaissance, broke on through via Rajneesh's chaotic meditation, practiced at the Zen Institute and studied the budding counterculture in all its Gotham manifestations. Meanwhile I was living in a commune in Flushing called Premundir with older Boomers who had dealt herb in the Haight years before, saved the money, came home and started local yoga/meditation courses (I would soon inherit), the food co-op on Fresh Meadow Lane (off Utopia Parkway) and the Sunflower Community Restaurant (later called Quantum Leap) which I co-managed. Every day was a blend of service, study and sadhana—and there was so much music. I learned to sing on key and play blues harp—and there were books, books, books. Everyday people read poetry.

In the entire four years at FU I only had one problem. I took a Phil of Asia course with an Indonesian prof, a Catholic convert of the more rectilinear persuasion. My class presentation was to be on the omkar, and when I suggested we all chant om, the prof said we couldn't go there. I wrote AG and he wrote back right away with a discussion of methods of chanting which I shared with the class which led the prof to relent so, using AG's instructions, we met outside of class and chanted om for about twenty minutes. A couple of months later I attended my first reading of AG (from *Fall of America*), had a memorable experience of his poetry aloud and felt my first connection to my vocation.

RR: Are you saying that it was at this reading that you decided to become a poet? How old were you?

KG: I was nineteen, but I don't know that one can decide to become a poet. I'd written stories, essays and free verse in high school, won a national journalism award, edited the school paper and lit mag, but the boundaries 'tween po' and prose loosened in the early Seventies with the Whitman renewal, New Journalism and the emerging outloud experiments downtown. Because of a very hip Robert Nettleton, faculty advisor for our lit mag and Joyce scholar, this was part of the Fordham scene, too.

So although I wrote, my sense of vocation was as a student of gyana (wisdom) yoga (union through intellectual, scriptural, cultural study). The connection to AG was the meditative state his recitation elicited. I walked out of the reading as if confirmed and

Eucharist-enriched. I had been fooling around with a musical long line, and Allen's skill inspired me to keep developing my own incantatory style, which was influenced by my studies with Yogi Bhajan, a Punjab-born laya (sound current, a/k/a naam) yoga adept, kundalini yoga teacher, mahan tantric and siri singh sahib (head minister in the Western world) of Sikh dharma. Though I never became a Sikh, I taught in his lineage for six years, humbled to the root to discover that through the grace of his teacher, Guru Ram Das, healing and shakti poured forth. The poets of the Sikh Bible—Nanak, Kabir, Mirabai, Arjun Dev—ran the voo doo down uniting sound and verse three hundred years before Blake. Quite a mind-blower! As Whitman sang, "Passage to more than India."

That's also why the summer of '78 at Naropa was such a life changer. I met many people engaged with the oral-aural, the collaborative, the spontaneous and meditative. I love the folks I studied with in grad school, but to be applauded for advancing elements of a literary tradition by the people who created the trad was a wake-up call to pursue my own style, no matter its lack of credential or element of "postbeat backlash" in the more academic, job-securifying MFA po' world.

RR: How did you come to be Allen's apprentice?

KG: I wrote him, re-visited our earlier correspondence, asked if there were vacancies, got a letter back saying yes, finished the spring semester, worked construction for a month, took a bus, knocked on his door, shook his hand and it was like coming home. Even though I was a white-clad, turban-wearing yoga/meditation teacher from a non-Buddhist

lineage, Allen took me everywhere and introduced me to everyone. It wasn't just tolerance—and that was a hard thing to find out West—it was mutual spiritual interest and inspiration just like my college years in NYC studying meditation and the arts.

AG was a most courageous human who took seriously the need to speak truth to power, said smart things when critiquing my work, had the best BS antennae I'd ever encountered and challenged me with: "Will that have relevance fifty years from now?" He digested feedback of all kinds and sought my critique of his *Plutonian Ode* which he was shopping to the *New York Times*. To my ear, it's in the same mansion as his more famous long poems, just a smaller room with no new groundbreaking poetics, overwhelming personal losses or bouts of ekstasis but then there needn't be. He's got invocation magic and prophecy power momentum with the Whitman echo, a musical ode that ends with a Tibetan jolt. In any case, afterwards as he patiently endured my smug criticisms that the *Times*, like the Democratic Party in '68, was too "culturally entranced" to get the Whole Truth, I saw how caught up in duality I was and how much bigger was his picture of things: he wanted the poem to have maximum exposure and Mr. Beat was hip enough to be square whenever skillful means called for it. I remember how he lamented the scene in Chicago, that squabbles between liberals and radicals had let Tricky Dick get over on the USA. AG also insisted I not just study with him and I learned a ton from Robert Duncan; Ted Berrigan and Tom Veitch, too. However, "old men with pee stains on their underwear" were helping turn him into Mama Ginsey, enabling their addictions, disenchantments and hustles. The Merwin incident with its implications of racism and fascism was still this sharp-stick-in-the-eye that kept moods 'tween poets and

meditators in “mere anarchy,” things Allen couldn’t square because “the center could not hold.”

Certainly “sight is where the eye strikes,” and perhaps I saw AG’s dilemma in bold because of my own spiritual community’s issues. In the early Seventies it was all about intensive yoga, bandha, kriya, tantra. The original call-and-answer songs were a blend of American blues and folk forms, jazz chords and Gurmukhi mantras. Our Sunday service featured a Meeting of the Ways where people of different paths came to share their unity-in-multiplicity. By ‘78, after troubles in India, the style shifted to learning Punjabi, playing ragas on harmonium and singing gurbhani kirtan in a starched call-and-answer style. Sunday became gurdwara, the trad Sikh service; it seemed the spiritual (seek; inner) was being eclipsed by the religious (obey; outer), a contradiction we couldn’t cohere.

A number of us living in or near the creative arts ashram in Phoenix began to hold our own sessions of song, art, poetry. We were all reading *The Transformative Vision* by Jose Arguelles that spring. He happened to live outside Boulder, so I visited him to tell him how valuable his book on art was to us, but per the paranoia of the hour, he was reluctant to open his door as he thought I was a member of the Vajra Squad, there to bust him for stepping off on Trungpa! It took a minute but he calmed down and we had a great visit. Those were the days of “cults” and de-programmers. My spiritual teacher happened to visit Boulder that summer to teach a tantric course and I tried to set up a meeting between him and Allen (they’d met favorably a few times) but was told with an

unexpected sharpness that the SSS didn't want any further contact with AG. To add to the crossroads crisscross, Norman Dubie, the guy with the Guggenheim who got my ass out of the steel mill and into ASU, was on the cover of *American Poetry Review* that month. I shared the mag with Allen, who to my surprise had no interest, though Dubie's work is an extension of the New York School just like AG. Hey, I'm not knocking Allen; I'm saying this great Whitmaniac and liberationist was held captive by the 10,000 demands of running the JK School and the Committee for Poetry. Seeing him double-binded by the people he was working for taught me that a writer needs to be free of apology, explanations, philosophies and other people's demands. I realized I could not represent my yoga family's official point of view, and instead of criticizing Yogi Bhanjan for not behaving according to my expectations, I had to take more responsibility for my own spiritual life.

RR: Why did you return to New York?

KG: Because five years away had made me homesick. In the summer of '79 I moved into the Lower East Side with people who would soon create the Foundation for Feedback Learning. I was hustling as a copy editor, proof reader, census taker and natural foods cook. A couple of years later, I taught high school English which led to teaching creative writing for CUNY's College of Staten Island where we got hold of a black box theater and did music-spoken word performances. While living in Richmond County where culture is not so abundant, artist friends and I started SILVPAC, Staten Island's Literary, Visual and Performing Arts Council, and played every venue there, including people's

homes. I worked inside a New York State prison for eight years teaching writing and producing a state-wide lit arts journal (*Empire!*) and a local prison newspaper (*Arthur Kill Alliance*). Toward the end of that tenure, Castillo Cultural Center published a series of three booklets and sponsored ten performances with ex-prison poets Hank Johnson, Ramon Ringo Fernandez, me and Nkuajay, percussionist and flutist. That led to the book party of my first fiction collection, *Dear Empire State Building*, with Castillo producing “Caribbean Moon,” a choreo-poem about prison that I wrote, directed by Ringo with music by Nkuajay, dancers and actors from Castillo and the priz program.

When I re-located to the Texas Hill Country in '94, I worked with congueros, guitarists and painters which led to a local press publishing *A Further Being*, a second fiction collection; the exposure led to work with Austin tenor saxer Tomas Ramirez. I played the San Miguel de Allende International Jazz Fest with his trio in 1996 which is where I met New York baritone saxophonist Claire Daly who would soon change my life, and after living in the French Quarter of New Orleans for a couple of years, I returned to the Apple. I worked in a free jazz mode on “Big Daddy Midnight” with old allies Peter Priore, an East Village bassist, and Steve Hirsch, an inventive percussionist.

RR: Ah, so Steven Hirsch is our common ancestor. Did you meet him at Naropa?

KG: He's certainly a brother from another mother and a Renaissance man on a motorcycle. We met in '82 in the West Village at a gem show he was exhibiting work in. He dug *Empire!*, the priz journal, and I dug his *Heaven Bone* lit mag. Collaborating with

him has been big fun from day one. The range of material got stronger with each issue, as did his skills as a publisher with a national distribution. So Steve brought to the show his fiancé Karen, who brought along Nick, a singer who had played a million gigs with Claire Daly. Nick called Claire the next day and told her to check my work. That was 2002 and we've been collaborating ever since. She's pulled my coat to a fuller appreciation of our musical heritage, especially big bands and composers like Oliver Nelson, Harold Arlen, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Joel Forrester, Dexter Gordon. I was so moved by her CDs that I started to write lines based upon the number of measures in the song's form. With her version of "Goodbye Porkpie Hat" playing, I found the words (w)rapped around the melody and fit. A week later we tried out the tune at a jazz/hip-hop fest in Cincinnati with beatboxer Napoleon Maddox and it came together like magic.

Slinging a word solo in tempo is more fun "wed to the ensemble" than being "out front." Rather than blowing over the chord changes, monopolizing the sound space or giving the band directions that reduce their musical genius to illustrating the mood of my words, I found that in two to four choruses I could celebrate the tune's history or mystery, swing hard, drop knowledge, incite mayhem, prompt the solos of the instrumentalists, get out of the way and let the music play on. In terms of rehearsal and performance, this approach, especially when using standards or a band mate's compositions, simplifies the whole shebang: we share a lead sheet, I indicate where I'm coming in and dropping out in the form and they do the rest. Bob Holman at Bowery Poetry Club munificently booked Claire for a series of Sunday brunches in '03 and that's how we evolved spoken-word-joins-the-jazz-love-fest. When she made a CD, *Heaven Help Us All*, in '04, I sat in on

two of her tunes and toured the country with her for two months. Jordan Jones, publisher of Leaping Dog Press, caught two of our shows in the Bay area and came to NYC in '06 with his soon-to-be-wife Leslie to help us make *Speak-Spake-Spoke*, a CD of spoken word and jazz with Claire as musical director, to accompany *Eros in Sanskrit*. Since its release there have been many versions of the band, but everyone who plays with us really has ears for aligning their sound with spoken word. I do solo readings, but if finances permit, I love taking the band. They bring the fullness.



Claire Daly, Kirpal, St. Mark's Church, 2011

RR: What's your current relationship to reading? Who do you read for inspiration, who do you read for pleasure, who do you read for information, whose literary work do you admire? Which works made you want to be a writer? What do you consider your literary lineage? Who do you consider your peers?

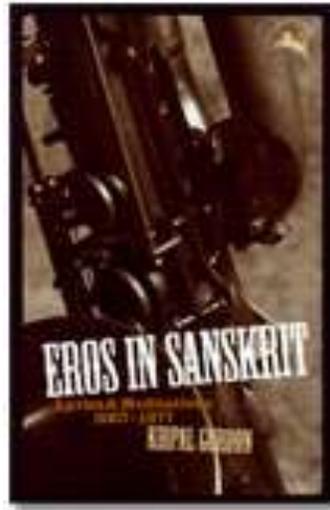
KG: In verse: *FAREWELLIA a la Aralee* (& spoken word CD) by Ralph La Charity; *The Blues of the Birth* (spoken word CD) by Mikhail Horowitz; *Seven Places in America: A Poetic Sojourn* by Miriam Sagan; *It's All Good: A John Sinclair Reader* (& spoken word

CD); *Dada Poetry: An Introduction* by William Seaton; *Sleepwalker's Songs: New & Selected Poems* by Jim Cervantes; *Swimming through Water* (& spoken word CD) by George Wallace; *Across the Table* (spoken word CD) by Janine Pommy Vega; *So There* (spoken word CD) by Robert Creeley and Steve Swallow; *Groundless Ground* and *Venerable Madtown Hall* (spoken word CD/DVD) by Jim Cohn; *Ghost Farm* by Pamela Stewart; *The Awesome Whatever* (spoken word CD) by Bob Holman; *Steel Valley* by Michael Adams; *A Very Funny Fellow* by Donald Lev; *A Lion at a Cocktail Party* by Michael Hogan; *Heavy Lifting* by David Alpaugh; *Ohio Blue Tips* by Jeanne Clark; *Improvisations* (visual poetry) by Vernon Frazer; *Ramapo 500* by Steve Hirsch; *The Crystal Prism* by David Stone. In plays: "The Last of the Knotts" by Doug Knotts and "Dig Infinity," Oliver Trager's trib to Lord Buckley. In non-fiction: *Between River & Rock* by Norman Ball; *Rhapsody in Black: a Biography of Roy Orbison* by John Kruth; *The Encyclopedia of Rebels* by Mel Freilicher; *Sunswumthru A Building* by Bob Arnold; *Straight Ahead: A Comprehensive Guide to the Business of Jazz (Without Sacrificing Dignity or Artistic Integrity)* by Marty Khan; *Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music* by Amiri Baraka; *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna; The Poetry Lesson* by Andrei Codrescu; *Miles Ornette Cecil—Jazz beyond Jazz* by Howard Mandel. In fiction: *Shadows on the Hudson* by Issac Bashevis Singer; *Best Ghost Stories* by Algernon Blackwood; *Last Exit to Brooklyn* by Hubert Selby; *The Double* by Greg Boyd; *The Plot Against America* by Philip Roth; *Time Passes Like Rain* by Harry Burrus; *Lucky* by Denis Gray; *Raise Your Right Arm* by Peter Cherches; *The Golem Triptych* by Eric Basso; *Changing the Subject* by Stephen-Paul Martin. These are titles I've reviewed, blogged on or re-read recently, mostly by peers.

My current and lifelong relationship to reading is one of addiction. I read for pleasure, moksha, money, inspiration and things worth stealing; for confrontation with the ax designed for the frozen sea within me; for ideas that can help my clients, for clues to the next thing I'm writing; for the dialogue, the plot's intrigue and catharsis; for the greater integration of all things, for the fortitude and the solitude. Reading is often the jump start to writing as well as a portable cave (for riding the subways). After all, the writer's life is one long sentence in different states of dismemberment: read read read like mad, gab debate gab, write wrong write, tear up/tear out/tear through, ponder-shape-edit, view-revise, then proof and print so that others can read read read because reading begets interpretation. The Old and New Testaments were primary texts we studied year in and year out. Once one got past the literal versions perped by the Church's need to appear as the one true and only way into salvation, how could one not be moved by the power of metaphor in Psalm 23 (The lord is my shepherd) or the symbolism in Eden, the poetry in the parables of Lamby Jesus or his elegant Beatitudes? The idea that a story can be read on different levels and contain different meanings to different people going through different phases—moral, psychological, social; ontogenic/phylogenic—was planted in our noggins early on.

We were primed for Poe and Hawthorne, Twain and Whitman, Kafka and Joyce, Woolf and Eliot, Pound and Stein, Jung and Freud, Erich Neumann and Joseph Campbell, Orwell and Huxley, Heller and Mailer, Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Gates' *Signifyin' Monkey*, Paul Bowles and Henry Miller, Borges and Garcia Marquez, Salinger

and Kerouac, Plath and Sexton, Vonnegut and Assimov, Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse, Doris Lessing and Malcolm X, Kesey and Tom Wolfe, Gary Snyder and Alan Watts, Pynchon and Heinlein, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, Kundera and Naipaul, Achebe and Ondaatje, Ntozake Shange and Ishmael Reed, Foucault and Freire, Auster and DeLillo, Miguel Algarin and Pinero. Many of their genre-bending/breaking works made me want to be a writer back in the day or have given me strength as a writer as well as greater clarity, craft, urgency, immediacy, intimacy. I don't see them as iconoclasts so much as rare talents whose post-conventional contents won't stay in a conventional container. Call them outlaws or revolutionaries at your own risk; they've helped me de-colonize my own mind, shape a multi-tiered narrative voice and appreciate East and West as compliments rather than opposites. On lineage(s), I feel kinship with anyone seeking freedom, whether from the bonds of illusion or oppression.



RR: Let's talk about your books. Speak on the evolution of the prose poems in *Eros in Sanskrit: Lyrics & Meditations, 2007-1977*.

KG: I'm fond of the prose poem because it can't be pigeon-holed; it's a deep mine, thanks to Poe, Edson and Bly. *Eros in Sanskrit* collects many different styles of writing from eleven limited editions united by the prose poem format: meditations, travelogues, lyrical invocations, serial narratives, performance pieces, jailhouse screeds and spoken word jazz medleys. For example, "Beware: You Are or Be Where You're Not" started life as an essay with the title as a repeating first line but morphed into a monologue performed by Ann Carlson with video installation in a show called the White Series. "Letter in Lady Day Spring Tones" is a multi-voiced plea in the scared straight tradition that I co-wrote and often perform with my ex-prison writing team that de-romanticizes incarceration. Remarkable priz and urban photography by Paula Siwek projected with a dissolve unit makes the piece truly scary in performance. If you play the famous version of Billie's "Fine and Mellow," you'll see the lyrics fit into the number of choruses her all-star band takes.

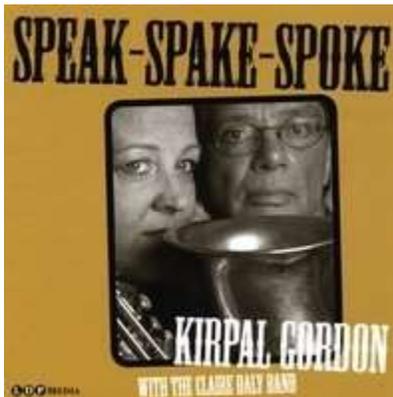
The prose poem has an additional use: the book's over 14,000 words long but on only 68 pages, an economic use of space, tree and coin. I also admire how German and French writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century used the prose poem to liberate poetic content from strict verse forms, but in certain cases I'm employing the paragraph to hide rhymes and measures. Literature is a mask and I'm in the incantation racket on the two and four, not writing about the ouija board Grandma left in the attic. Were I to lay out the work like verse, a reader would peep my hole card and make the end rhyme predictable, but reading it aloud in a paragraph allows for shock and awe, the gatekeepers

to “the opening of the field.” That’s been the evolution of my thinking: give shock and awe and let the spirit do the rest.

Poetry is a service industry, yet while writing and performing these works over the decades I discovered many folks have no clue as to how to read po’, whether ordered like Longfellow or all over the page like ee cummings’ iambs or Dr. Williams’ variable foot in triplicate lines. However, every literate person knows how to read a paragraph in their own natural voice, so why not start there? Because the words are meant to be read aloud, my interest has shifted from their visual arrangement on the page to giving readers greater access to their sound. I dispensed with syllabics, stanzas, codas, quatrains. Line breaks, however clever or dramatic or breath-centric, became a distraction to the eye at the cost of what the ear could hear.

The homonym liar/lyre seems/seams the fuller truth/truer fullness.

Lastly, the prose poem format helps readers of *Eros in Sanskrit* become listeners of *Speak-Spake-Spoke*, its companion CD. Each paragraph fits in tempo with the song’s melody to celebrate the union of note and lyric.



RR: *Eros in Sanskrit* is subtitled “Lyrics and Meditations 2007-1977.” You’ve already addressed the lyrical reference for these prose poems, but how about the meditations part? And the dates: why backwards? And thirty years—that’s quite a gestation. I don’t imagine you saw the first pieces from 1977 as part of this particular work. Can you describe the creative process over this 30-year period to come up with this text? Can you talk a bit about the experience of creating the CD *Speak-Spake-Spoke* and what you learned about the relationship between the written word and the spoken word during this process?

KG: The meditation poem in the West, especially since Emerson substituted nature for theology, suggests to me that its aim is to deliver the reader into an aesthetic arrest and a meditative state. Ditto in the Sanskrit traditions; the shabd (verse line)—shaped by alliteration, repetition, pun, internal rhyme and sung aloud to the appropriate ascending-descending scale (raga)—relies in part on the rhythmic permutation and combination of certain seed syllables causing the tongue (lingam) to stimulate meridian points along the roof of the mouth (yoni) that connect to the pituitary and pineal glands. So the meditation side of the equation is everywhere you find it, though the quality of the meditation may change. For example, “Appearances” is just a two paragraph evocation to autumn in the book, but spoken aloud on the CD with the band playing Kirk’s “Serenade to a Cuckoo,” the evocation heralds spookier meanings.

Writing-performing these works over so many years gave them new meanings, too. Like water over stone, they lost their asides, complaints, half-steppin’ moments.

Dark nights hollowed out their insufficient cores; deeper insights poured in. I began to see them not as individual works but parts of a whole celebrating one lifetime canto: love as a nondual experience in which lover and beloved are one.

Regarding the creative process, it wasn't so much gestation as labor—the driving force of the poem wouldn't leave me alone. The title piece, for example, was written and published in '77, but it took me many expanding drafts to develop its connection to everything else in the book, something I could not rush. George Harrison's version of the Iso Upanishad with London Hare Krishna musicians helped. Every syllable matters, even more so aloud, and there's nothing like speaking lyrics into song forms to deliver words' new possibilities. For example, on the CD the band plays Tommy Dorsey's arrangement of Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Song of India" to the title piece making it fun and light-hearted, but on the bandstand when I need a ballad, I sometimes call Eli Yamin's "Jacquet's Meditation" and read it to that slower melody for a contemplative vibe.

In terms of a total delivery when working with a band, the real knock-out is not just the context or contrast a song gives a lyric, but how the solos of the musicians breathe life into the spoken word tale. Like on "Spring Can Really Hang You up the Most" and "Equinox"—piano and bari sax solos *are* the words expressed in notes. So working with musicians has shaped these lines for the better. Ditto putting them on stage because an audio-ence doesn't just listen; it communicates what it hears. I don't know why the dates are backward, but everything seeks to turn inside out and become its opposite in *Eros in Sanskrit*, so why not?



RR: I like that you don't know why the dates are backward! I developed a theory that you were talking about roots and gestation in the pieces, and so you were pointing out that so much of the present moment was planted unknowingly in the past—including this brand new book. And also as a nod to how much of past there is—in this case thirty years of it—involved in creating a single work of art. It made me think of Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

I want to turn to a detailed examination of your prose work now. Almost half of the stories in *New York at Twilight* are written in women's voices, and another is narrated by an African-American man, another by a Greek-American male. Your novel *Round Earth, Open Sky* is written by what appears to be a Native-American spirit. Your latest novel (*Go Ride the Music*) is written from the point of view of a young East Indian woman. Why do your stories so often feature a narrator who is definitely not you? Let's take "Television Jones." How did you come to write it from the point of view of an African-American, especially one portrayed as a dispassionate and hollow sex addict?

Why did he have to be an African-American? And why is so much of your fiction written in women's voices?

KG: My stories often feature a narrator who is not me because a great deal of the time I am working as a ghostwriter, praise singer, interviewer, dramatist, reporter, confidant, scribe to tribes, interpreter, psycho-electro-magnetic antennae, witness, mask through which the disembodied sing, container of multitudes and contradictions. Nevertheless, the issue you bring up, permission to speak on what the author is not—like race, gender and ethnicity—is serious and sensitive with a long, unfortunate history of misunderstanding, something I hope to help change, and I mean no disrespect.

The misunderstood protagonist in “Television Jones” can't get any respect either. What he's up against is institutional, insidious, invisible. By characterizing him as “a dispassionate and hollow sex addict” rather than a lonely and divided man working through his therapy, perhaps you're not giving the tale's dynamics their due. The brother is an underground revolutionary by night and a municipal auditor by day passing for white whose wife walked out on him when he told her the circumstances of his felony arrest and bid. His evening pursuit of a meaningful hook-up with performance artist Mulani, blocked by Enrique from his T group, is juxtaposed in the TV footage behind them of another brother getting beaten on by the LAPD asking why we can't all just get along. The story also doubles as a parable about testosterone making a smart man stupid by reducing his life to only things he can kill or penetrate. Jean-Claude Baptiste, like his

namesake, is in a twilight moment seeking a different kind of baptism, one that integrates his day and night, black and white selves into a new gestalt.

In “The Zeitgeist of Love” the know-it-all college sophomore wondering why there’s evil in the world is of Greek heritage, just like his outer borough Astoria neighborhood, and that’s no arbitrary set-up either. His xenophobic Greek parents, condescending Orthodox pastor and incomplete investigations into Socrates all conspire to deliver him into an inescapable twilight moment with his Teutonic girlfriend and her sister in Little Italy. In “The Magus of the Blue Hour” X (chromosome?) got it bad for Y, but X is too turned on to suss out Y’s intent. It’s a satiric allegory with erotic Borsch Belt humor about desire, role reversal and the unconscious part humans play in the planet’s extinction at this twilight hour. X also connects to wild daughter Colleen X in “Lustrum at the Flushing RKO” who connects with the X factor in “Television Jones.” Everything interconnects, story by story. Walt Whitman, whose work is celebrated in “Petals of Pushpema,” is the collection’s tutelary light. As the narrator in “St. Philibert’s Feast Day” puts it, “Everyone turns out to be me in the City of Karmic Completion.” On the other hand, Shiva is the collection’s tutelary deity and metamorphosis the only game in town.

Six of the tales are written in third person omniscient, but I blur the narration so it reads in places like a protagonist’s first person cranial. Another six were originally written as monologues performed for the stage: a milquetoast commuter fleeing the archer of death, an older Holden Caulfield emailing his dead author, a Central Park jogger entering an alternative universe, a downtown pedestrian sauntering to a Monk tune

at dusk, a Puerto Rican prisoner envisioning the divine mother and a nutty diva escaping Gotham. The tales “progress a pilgrimage” from panic about cosmic consciousness (weird) to a kind of acceptance (eerie), and in my enthusiasm to celebrate the city of my birth, its distinctive neighborhoods, ethnic flavors and its transformative twilight moments, no question: I may have busted a few politically incorrect moves.

Go Ride the Music tells of a young Kolkata-born woman who has an auditory hallucination that changes her life. It’s also a parable about the spirit root of jazz and how a former baul of Bengal and student of classical Indian music and dance comes to appreciate its redemptive power, especially in regard to the New Orleans pianist she falls in love with. As in the other depictions, character and destiny turn out to be the same thing, so how else to deliver the goods but through Ganga Ghosh, a composite of many gals I’ve met in the song and dance business; her life *is* the story.

RR: Something else that is notable in your fiction is a growing interest in having the plot forwarded by the dialogue. Who have you studied, or studied with, or learned from in your use of dialogue?

KG: I directed a prison student’s play at ASU, and while I was working in the joint a few years later, I did a lot of what became known as performance art, developing and delivering spoken word texts, skits, one acts. Armory Plays commissioned me to create a multimedia show with music, dancers, actors and ex-cons from my prison workshop, and I wrote material for many voices, collected in *This Ain’t No Ball Game*. That led to

collaborations with playwright Darrah Cloud, including *Nickel & Dime*, a screenplay about prison life which led to work as a HBO script advisor. It's all helped me make dialogue stronger. I've never thought about this before, and I'm glad you brought it up. Certainly Salinger writes dialogue that enriches character and advances a plot simultaneously. When dialogue delivers the distinctive voices of the characters, it's hard to go wrong. Opening a story or a novel with dialogue can thrust the reader into events that are already taking place. Without a mediating omniscient narrator, the reader is thrown into the suspense of having to make sense of what's happening—like real life.



RR: I was fascinated by the number of wisdom traditions and practices and teachings namechecked in *Round Earth, Open Sky*. Could you give us a bit of a reader's guide to the variety of buttresses you reference that situate what you are exploring in that novel into a larger psycho-spiritual-multicultural-artistic history?

KG: *Round Earth, Open Sky* exemplifies your earlier Faulkner quote on time. It's an allegory about the embodiment of consciousness in a carbon form, a dream book whose hero insists past, present and future don't exist and proves it in the last chapter in which

we witness his initiation via death and rebirth into the tube-suck cure he has been practicing from the first chapter. As you graciously put it, “written by what appears to be a Native-American spirit,” it’s a sci-fi suspense thriller driven not by whodunit but by who-be-it, a being from another dimension existing in a human body only temporarily who must find the portal back to his sky people. Regarding your earlier ethics-of-ethnicity question, some of the Native Americans handle his dilemma better than the more ratiocinated urban gringos.

In structuring the cyclic story I drew from the SF Ren serial poem. Assemblage, montage, the layering of collage and bricolage, the repeating sequence of theme and variation helped create a more impressionistic narrative, especially in mixing landscape and metaphysics with human conflicts and chatter. Riffing on fictional characters—Castenada’s Yaqui brujo Don Juan, Heinlein’s Valentine Michael Smith in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Lessing’s Charles Watkins in *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell*—and the buddy/road sagas of Kerouac; the films *Being There*, *Starman*, *Angel Heart*, *Rashomon* and *Whistle Down the Wind*; the Tao-like Jesus of *The Gospel of Thomas*, his John-the-baptizer rabbinic lineage, his Orphic and Dionysian roots as well as a remark a Native American made on PBS (“The whites had Jesus and we had the land; now the whites got the land and we got Jesus”), I found in Sky Man a redemptive son/lover and psychedelic avatar-immortal capable of becoming whoever people think him to be. The Mexicana living in a boxcar in the Sonoran desert who takes him for a lover calls him Hey-sus Christay and tells Moses, a Jewish New York photographer who stops to take a picture, that Hey-sus was pushed out of the desert’s womb “to heal the tear in the world,” words

Moses recognizes from Kabbalah. He calls Sky Man a luftmensch (literally air man but meaning space cadet) and agrees uncertainly to drive him to breakfast. They meet Moses' crush Beverley, a Navajo who calls Sky Man a berdache or two-spirit, a counselor in love medicine, and she invites Moses into the walk-in cooler to get lucky. So it goes at every stop: luck of every kind follows Moses. His Hopi friend Paul remembers Sky Man from a ceremony long ago, but whether as a healer or sorcerer, Paul doesn't know and tells Moses it depends on his family. That clue takes them to Sedona where Moses' friends deliver the name and Detroit address of the dead human Sky Man inhabits which leads to an isle in the Great Lakes where a medicine couple helps Sky Man make his return through a hole in the sky.

So although rooted in Native American shamanic culture and the Ojibwe legends of Nanabozho, its boughs and branches leaf out into necromancy, bardo states, time travel, Greek mythology, prehistoric hunting/gathering rituals, Yiddish, the art of photography, the history of the Isle of Manitou, its ancient rites of midsummer, maenads, unrequited love, missing fathers, incarceration, extreme desert conditions, psychological breakdown, amnesia, magic, family secrets, meditations on the open road, identity, mind reading, siddhis, picture-talk language, incubus-succubus visitations, Hohokum artifacts, morgue bodies awakening, ayahuasca and psilocybin ingestion, love and its regeneration.



RR: You talk at the end of *Go Ride the Music* about a possible "double narrative." I'm wondering about your two published novels. Did you start out wanting to talk about something—say the presence of non-physical realities interacting in *Round Earth, Open Sky*, and about the history of music from ancient India to American blues and jazz to transmit other non-physical realities interacting with this one?

KG: Exactly so. In *Go Ride the Music* Ganga Ghosh realizes the words in the liner notes Ghost Wakefield wrote *long ago* on the inside cover of the musical CD she's playing are actually an invocational code (and a double narrative) framed to music to help her awaken him from his coma *now*. It's the same medley of Duke/Strayhorn tunes that induced her auditory hallucination years before and set her on the path to working with Ghost. To illustrate jazz as an experience of awakening, I referenced India's singing traditions because both jazz and Indian vocals deliver a similar sense of wonder, a totality intuited but unseen. Play Miles and Bill Evans' "Flamenco Sketches" or Mahalia Jackson singing "Come Sunday" next to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's Qawwali songs or Ramnad Krishnan's improvs to hear the healing.

The novels' real point of departure is non-Aristotelian, that is, at every turn the story is both true and not true, depending on the phase of the journey the reader and/or the characters are on. In *Round Earth, Open Sky* the cynical and hung-over photographer Moses neither sees nor believes much of what weird Sky Man says or does, but miraculous things happen all the same, even if Moses can't cohere them until love opens his heart at the end of the tale. The willingness to proceed in media res and in a negatively capable way is central to both novels' form and content. I trust readers to be perceptive detectives, so why not create events that they must figure out along the way?

RR: Allen Ginsberg famously claimed that the purpose of "the work" is to ease human suffering. Somebody—was it Lew Welch?—said that if you write poems at seventeen it's because you're seventeen. If you write poems when you're thirty, it's because you're a poet. You've been part of the writing and music and art scene for over four decades by now. How has your vision on what you do and why you do it changed over time?

KG: Money changes everything. I agree with Ginsberg's insight about literature easing suffering, but how do you separate the remark from the remarker? AG held a position most unique in American letters: he made a living via indie published po' and SRO readings outside the university-tenure-plantation-mainstream-pub-racket, enough coin not only for himself but for his friends. Perhaps his wisest appropriation of Asian meditation trads was his use of ju-jitsu in dealing with the media and the public. With candor (prajna) and marketing savvy (upaya) he turned whatever infamy he was accused of into another celebration of being himself. Jack Spicer, on the other hand, playing Emily

Dickenson to Allen's Whitman, lived in a self-imposed exile, shared his work with few, died from booze at 40 and never experienced the recognition AG did.

Hidden inside your question I sense an implicit parable in the lack of a parallel 'tween their two lives, yes? Spicer's eye to verse writ at 17 (all) versus verse writ at 30 (few) suggests which innuendos: the po' life is an angst addiction, a calling, a refusal to grow up, a cover for narcissists, a category mistake, a problematic career move? Talk about the opposite of easing suffering: poetry can *cause* suffering to the people who go broke writing, publishing, performing, recording, sponsoring, documenting, reviewing and selling it. Whitman said great poetry needs great audiences, but it could be argued that instead of a great audience, old Walt found the citizens of his day were not ready to sing the body electric or appreciate his love of men and women as a manifestation of democracy let alone acknowledge the Vedic non-dual self in *Song of Myself*. Our Puritanical, outer-directed, conformist, sexually repressed, Maya-enmeshed country whose history of enslaving African peoples, exterminating Native peoples, exploiting immigrants and raping women and land is our unspoken inheritance as I understand it as an American writer with over four decades in the game: rather than live the message, we kill the messengers with either rejection or a kind of acceptance that reduces the message to the size of our prejudiced minds. We're not a white or Christian nation; we're amnesiacs to a multiple tragedy, a mestizo people 'plexed up about our own mixed blood. Here's the legacy of fame, fecal matter and American letters: if you celebrate yourself, Walt, better wear a raincoat. Like Kerouac warned, don't get stoned outside your home.

Regarding my vision on what I do and how it's changed over time: back then the conversation was about a writer's distinctive voice and the quality of her content, things that got better in my case with time. Lessons learned in free verse improved my songs and songsmithing chiseled my prose; journalism and group dynamics training paid dividends in ghostwriting for business clients and ghostwriting's fees eased the zero-sum misery of the avant garde; reading boring copy as an editor, professor and manuscript doctor compelled me to write better copy for my clients, students and readers; likewise, watching dreadful spoken word and music performances shaped in me a deeper commitment to the woodshed, the band and the jazz trad.

Why do I do it? Doctor, how much time do you have?



Steve Elmer, Kirpal, Cornelia Street Café, 2012

RR: What are you working on now?

KG: *Lyrical Miracle*, a new CD of music and spoken word with pianist Steve Elmer; *Untelevised Revolutions*, a fiction collection troping on Gil-Scott's theme that

revolutionary acts are often private events; *I Hear America Singing*, an evening of Whitman and music; *The WhiteStoners*, a novel in tribute to the old neighborhood.



Backyard Garden, Flushing, 2013

RR: How do you spend your non-writing time?

KG: The work-play load varies, but I try to spend part of the day away from computers, phones and language. Putting my hands in soil, trimming trees, planting shrubs, growing moss and moving rocks around provides a balance. Building meditation gardens wherever I've lived has had another advantage. People sit in the garden and experience a meditative moment even though they may have no interest in meditation—the garden delivers it anyway. That's my intent in the writing as well: to get the reader past the mental censor and into the event.

I also listen to music every day, and for the last forty years, when the mood strikes, I make theme-based music mixes encompassing all the genres. Hearing the

interconnectedness of these songs, I understand how inadequate are the categories and descriptions of the music by the industry that once controlled it.

It gives me hope as a writer in this post-conglomerate publication era.

RR: I want to ask one last question. Do you think there's a purpose to your life? Do you think there's a reason for your particular path and manifestation in this lifetime?

KG: Purpose may be overrated in a universe that keeps singing and dancing its energetic delight. Purpose presumes one's got it all figured out, but I can't magnetize a memory, absorb anyone's content or write word one when I'm strutting around pretending I know what I'm doing. Purpose also presumes there's somewhere to get to—goodness, glory, enlightenment, heaven—and a method for getting there, but what if we are already there and our acting all puffed up with our own porpoise were the big joke? What if love is the ocean we emerge from in this human birth and what if love is what sustains us in our journey back to formlessness and what if love is what we miss out on in our quest to be the best so “god” will love us above the rest? This unique manifestation-of-the-Universe/human-container-called-you-or-me must die and that's what the hysteria is about, seeking to permanent-ize a me-ness one can't even recognize as I. What else sends us into incarnating our own DNA? If we weren't afraid of death, why wouldn't we see through religions that promise paradise for me and hellfire for you? Why can't atonement be spelled at-one-ment? I would beware/be where of purpose when used as a noose by the “predators of the afterlife” to rope in their prey grasping and strangling and making

deals for an alleged salvation. I'd rather be love, service and surrender to what is right now taking place in all its unknow-ability.

Regarding the second question, I don't know if there are reasons for my particular path or even if I am on a path. In a playful universe reason may be as overrated as purpose. Even your phrase "in this lifetime" may be presuming too much as I can't recall any others, and if I could, I'm not sure your construction would be really anything more than a metaphor. The West reifies the metaphor of a sacrificing spring god-man whose spilled blood blooms the wood and opens the gates to beatific vision for the sinner's soul while the East revels in the metaphor of karma, reincarnation and transmigration of the soul. What if these "soul truths" were merely metaphorical "as ifs" to keep people anxious or caught up in the illusion of "becoming a better person" or submissively obedient to a status quo that oppresses them? What if the Apocalypse expressed in the Abrahamic (Judeo-Christian-Islam) lineage were merely the end of history as the context for a covenant of revelation with a timeless, invisible Be-ing who may be none other than the core of our real and deepest self? As for the Hindu-Jain-Buddhist-Confucianist-Far Eastern notions of honoring one's ancestors and gaining merit for one's next life, what if time's the trickster causing us to believe we're separate pieces of the one big joinery? What if, in spite of our I-yi-yi, me-me-me and get-justify-protect-aggress, we're all one already? What if there's nothing to do but laugh at our own foolish schemes and weep at our own lack of charity?

Nevertheless, to change gears and answer your question more personally, let me shout halleluiah. I was blessed with a curiosity and passion to explore certain cosmic

premonitions that frightened-threatened my family's values and the Church's teachings. To integrate this learning, I had to step up and stop using my scribal/oratorical skills as a weapon against the people holding me down. I'd been beaten and silenced at home and in school, and the retaliating feinschmecker in me certainly wanted to do serious work on abusers of authority everywhere, but the gift I was given wasn't going for that. I knew I must change my life to give the gift in me a chance. Like Yeats, I had to "go to Innisfree,
/ And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made" to shape a home for the gift so the gift could keep singing "in the bee-loud glade."