

3/8/01 Thursday's Rock, Giles Néagual  
Closing time: 10:10 p.m., C.S.T.

### Covert Operators

Certain toads, some harbored in vivariums in a cinderblock house in Tempe, AZ, others in the basement of a Colonial in Langhorne, PA., and some in the Sonoran Desert wilds, stirred in their slumbers under their blankets of sand. A smell hung in the Valley of the Sun's hot, dry midday air. The birds sensed it, too. Wren, sparrow, pigeon, in the tall Date Palms swaying above turquoise waters, bounced signals of alarm through leathery rustling fronds. It was not the smell of chlorine, but it was a greenish chemical smell that had nothing in it of life or joy, an odor that boded ill for the warty or wingéd tribes, and set them respectively to dreaming and vocalizing. Astarte Pearson, not breathing, at the bottom of the Golden Keys Association Pool, her father, Devon, sleeping, but leaping ubiquitously out of one body to generate another — these types of phenomena are common. Not everyday occurrences, to be sure, but everynight ones, that is to say, they are the commonplace happenings of dreams. Any neophyte Scientist of Awareness yawns with disinterest to hear these things stated again and again, *ad nauseam*, but even the more advanced investigators of such phenomena often straighten in their seats and sit up to take notice when the more esoteric facts are trotted out by Herr Professor. Ack! Ack! Ack! That portion of the Rock Gazing Texts, which has hitherto served as a bedtime story, suddenly ceases its soporific dawdling and trumpets the sharp Doo-dal-a-Doo-ta-Doo! of a clarion call. For example, there is a gateway situated somewhere between earth-time calendar coordinates 2023 and 2001 whose portal is located in a certain area, a.k.a. region of interest, in the basil forebrain. This evolutionary seed, as it has sometimes been metaphorically referred to, is as ancient as the first photoreceptors in the earliest bacteria, but it is likewise quite futuristic. The texts sometimes refer to this seed as the phoster-point, a little starburst that jumpstarts pineal, hypothalamus and pituitary. The ignition pops certain interior brain ventricles, and the wings of the swan, the so-called Paramahansa, open. If this happens during sleep, it is (ho-hum) common, and temporary. But if the swan flies when the subject is awake, it is far from common, and when this wing-opening becomes permanent, as it was in the case of little Astarte and her dithering father, bells chime in the empyrean, angels fly, microbes deep in the soil happily hum. It is at this juncture, or phoster-point, that the Consciousness Body is able to enter the psychode. Of course, any C.B., upon so entering, can travel infinitely fast and far, as well as simultaneously through all directions of time, having, as is well known, no mass to be impeded. “But,” asks the now alert Scientist of Awareness, “how could Devon Sephera's C.B. get to the bottom of that pool and rescue and resuscitate the very physical five-year old Astarte? This being a thing impossible to achieve by any known material or metamaterial means.” The question, whose mathematical proofs have lagged behind the experiential data, burned as well in the mind of Margarethe Schiller (née Erhardt) who had witnessed the phenomenon, and who, if not yet quite dying to know, was at least quite antsy to know, the answer. Magarethe did not cotton to children in Der Golden Keys Vaterland, and the presence of a magical Mädchen and her possibly ubiquitous Vater enraged the Condoassociationfürher to no end. Such things, if not expressly *verboten* in the by-laws, were at least by insinuation darkly frowned upon. She

had a grudge to bear, at any rate with her young neighbor, a loathsome squatter, a renter, and one whose slacker stone-and-astroturf-landscape maintenance allowed the occasional frond to slip from the untrimmed palms in his back yard and to come to rest, as big as elephant's ears, on her immaculate patio. Of course, in her role as Golden Keys Home Owners Association President she had moved quickly to lop off these recalcitrant palms, and to poison their populations of messy birds too while she was at it. But that was not enough. The problem begged for a final solution. She was looking for a pretext to oust this vermin, keeping her sharp blue eye on this life unworthy of life, in order to end it — well, at least to end that part of it abiding in the Golden Keys. But that eye now was having trouble adjusting to the fact ACK! ACK! ACK! ACK! ACK! ACK! ACK! ACK! that there were two Devon's, at minimum, and they could be in two places at once. Margarethe narrowed her eyes, the ice chips melting in hatred and disgust. The occult was not something, as Herr Professor should perhaps explain to the reader, that was foreign to her, the black arts being highly prized by the Nazis, and Margarethe, except for that one horrible slip-up — wrench, oh heart, at the deformity of this monstrous birth — was a past a mistress of Ectenic Force. At the sight of Devon rescuing Astarte, Margarethe's mind sped down old occult pathways that buzzed like arrow-straight Autobahns all the way back to the Third Reich. The wake of this thought-journey was littered with things far more pitiful and more heinous than lopped off palm fronds or even poisoned birds. The cloudless skies above Scottsdale darkened as if a polarized lens had suddenly been applied to them. Margarethe's hatred had aroused the defenses of the region's immune system, and the weather, ever mindful of its role, knew, long before the weathercasters, that someday soon, a strange rain was going to bathe this cement-encased portion of the Sonoran Desert, a rain that would have nothing to do with the seasonal monsoons. She looked up and noticed that the infernal birds in the Date Palms had, squawking, limed the white stone fence imprisoning the turquoise community pool, and were now suddenly flying south for the protection of Papago Park. 'Good riddance,' she thought, as her enemies fled the field. But the birds were not surrendering, their flight being only a tactical maneuver for the coming battle. Even the toads, both wild and kept, made rare but brief appearances in the daylight hours, opening their eyes for a moment above the protecting sands. Yes, definitely, the players were taking their parts, the rehearsals were nearing their end. The panzers were massed at the borders, the Luftwaffe fueling and arming. Only the pretext for this preemptive war was waiting to be deceitfully sprung, and this pretext was something Margarethe would find or make. The agents knew that "*Die heilige Pflicht* Response" had been triggered in an apostate, and that any final solution that the former National Socialist might implement to restore the Golden Key's erstwhile established order would almost certainly entail a good bit of collateral damage. Margarethe had been surprised by the sudden appearance of a wizard in her own vector and the name of an old *Kolleg* stormed into her mind as she furiously surmised that the forces of the Collective had started an offensive of their own, the preparations, which must have been long and intense, going on right under her handsome aquiline nose without her realizing it. As she stomped across the hot, immaculate asphalt of the street to return to her condo and make that all important phone call, she was fuming, and when her fat, gray tabby, Esclarmonde, greeted her at the door to pester her for kibbles, she kicked her familiar out of the way as she blitzkrieged through the house and into the kitchen. "YOU! You haf the audacity to beg for food ven right next door dis

trouble was brewing and you had said nothing about it. It is a betrayal, that is what it is! And, I tell you, *miene Muncie*, there will be reprisals! Ja! Reprisals!” She punched its numbers hard enough to make the wall telephone jump in its jack, and when the voice on the other end finally answered, it was all she could do to contain herself and commandeer a civil phrase in English.

Magarethe: Ve vill meet.

The Voice: We aren't on the same side of the fence anymore, Margaret.

Margarethe: There is no fence. There is only von side. And I tell you, ve vill meet.

The Voice: Fine. Thursday, 9:10 a.m., Mountain Standard Time. Coffee Plantation. Mill Avenue. Down the street from Changing Hands Bookstore.

Margarethe: Ja, I know *der* place, but I do not like that time.

The Voice: That's the time. Take it or leave it.

Margarethe: You are making a dangerous enemy.

The Voice: You'll have to grab a number and get in line. I've got legions of them.

Margarethe: Es ist Klar. Let us synchronize our watches.

Boisterous, they swarmed, noisy and uncouth, their need for caffeine crying in their veins. The Uhr on the wall spoke wrongly of the time: 9:08 a.m. It was, she knew, 9:09. Her contact would arrive in one minute. One large hot, Vienna Roast, black, for her, one, mango, iced herbal decaf tea for her contact, rested on the table. She preferred not to attend to the gaggle of college students, business rabble, *Hausfrauen* on their way to golf or shopping, the *Ünterrassen* of the Greater Phoenix area, plundering life with ineffectual gestures and empty conversation. Instead she looked at the walls. Painted they were, by someone who knew something of the rainforests of an ideal coffee country. Inga trees. Coffee shrub — both frosty with new blooms and red with ripened cherries. Epiphytic plants: bromeliads, orchids, ferns, a lush smorgasbord of niches for migratory birds, Toucan, Parrots, Spider Monkeys, Ocelot, Jaguar. They were watching her, she knew. What did they see? A handsome woman past seventy, but looking more like a very fit fifty. Perfect Nordic stock. Shiny blond/gray hair pulled back neatly in a bun, not one fine strand misplaced above the high unlined forehead, ball-bearing cheekbones, firm mouth, determined chin. Why had the years, which had ravaged so many, so indiscriminately, spared her? She smiled a thin smile, narrowing her eyes to outface her helpless, painted victims. One of the Spider Monkeys looked her in the eye, its own white eye-rings blazing with accusation: “This is what was before you began your depredations. Importation of leaf rust from Africa and the sub-continent, the push for technified sun grown, for more production, the onslaught of IMF loans for synthetic fertilizers, agrochemicals, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, nematocides. No

agroforestry here, acidic runoff, dead birds, deformed children, a No Man's Land of misery where once trees loomed through the drift of forest clouds. "Ja, too much clutter in the landscape," she answered, with cynical aplomb, "no opportunities for investment. Decorative bits of living garbage, your precious ecosystem. It is better now. Far more efficient." She was sorry however for the ocelot and jaguar, but fortunately the arrival of her contact, abruptly suspended any indulgence in *that* emotion.

The Contact: Margaret.

Margarethe: Howard.

He sat close to her, but his voice was unnaturally loud while his manner was cold and distant. 'Plus,' she thought, 'what ist dhat smell?'

Margarethe: It is good to see you again, Liebchen, I miss the old days at DARPA.

The Contact: What? Project "Big Dog." Robotic canines. Mechanical elephants for the jungles of Southeast Asia. Programmed piranha. What was the official hype? "Harnessing the insights and power of biology to make warfighters and their equipment more effective."

Margarethe: Come, come, Liebchen, it was not all seriousness. We had fun with the "go-pills." Adapting honeybees to detect explosives and other "odors of interest." Building insect databases.

The Contact: Yes. "Understanding how to use endemic insect systems in key operational systems here and abroad." Both idiotic and ineffectual.

Margarethe (laughing, despite the seriousness of her companion's expression): Ja! Ja! But the funding was always there. And there were lots of good times. 'High jinks,' I think you call them.

The Contact (sniggering in spite of himself): Yes. Some. Project X-Ray.

Margarethe (quickly grabbing her napkin, to stop from sputtering coffee, her eyes shiny with mirth): Ja! Bats with incendiaries strapped to their bodies! Homed back to the eaves of the barracks and burned down the base!

They both laughed.

Margarethe: Good times. Good times.

The Contact (controlling himself, and glancing at his watch): Good time is wasting, Margaret. You didn't call me here to chitchat about the past.

Margarethe (reminded of her mission, grows cuttingly cold): You've changed, Liebchen. You talk too loud. And you smell bad too. Pah! (she moves away from him).

The Contact: Occupational hazards.

Margarethe (sarcastically): What? Studying how geckos climb walls, finding new approaches to unterwasser camouflage. 'Oooh, how inte-Res-ting: see how the octopus hides. This vill enable us to find new approaches to stealth locomotion for submarine Remote Operating Vehicles.

The Contact: What do you want? And make it quick, because at 9:18, I am on the other side of that door.

Margarethe: What do you know about Devon Sephera.

The Contact: Devon who?

Margarethe: Spielt nicht der Dumkopf mit mir. What do you know?

The Contact: What do you care?

Margarethe: There is only von reason vhy I vould not be told these things.

The Contact: You know the protocol.

Margarethe: (Her handsome, steely visage collapsed for a moment in grief and alarm. Suddenly, she was almost pleading): Give me etwas. A name. A place. Any thing. (Then she added, trying to sound tender, her hand touching his arm.) For old time's sake, Liebchen.

The Contact: (He looked at her for a few seconds, his mouth twisted with disdain. He pulls his arm free from her touch. Then he relented, wrote something on his unused napkin, and slid it face down across the table). Here. *Cloying* doesn't become you, Margaret. Your Nazi bitch scthick works better.

Margarethe (She gave him a hard stare, but she took the paper gratefully, and raised her cup in a toast.) To bees *und* geckos! Bats *und* octopi!

The Contact (He was already standing up, but he lifted his hitherto untouched glass of iced-mango tea and replied): To toads!

Then he was gone. She glanced at the wallclock: 9:17 a.m., one minute slow. Her eyes were still a bit watery. She would not have been kept in the dark, she knew, unless *she* was the "subject" of the investigation. A sick feeling swam in her stomach. Was this a trap? She blinked the tears dry, then read the napkin:

Bud McDermott. Crystal Caldron.

### **Mammary**

Today is another day of clouds. Perhaps  
It will rain, perhaps not. The body stoops a little  
In the gray. Life in the cave resumes its  
Narrow rounds. This is why the primal hermits  
Retired to the desert. They surrendered  
Moisture to attain light. They gave up tears  
And sex and sweat to suckle what is bright:  
The white line, the dry milk, the dust of bliss.  
And see, the trade was worth it. Here they sit,  
Fed by the rich elixir of the sun.

2/26/01 Monday's Rock, Sandro Lingam  
Closing time: 9:44 p.m., C.S.T.

If these statements be correct, why should not animals be held penally responsible for their conduct as well as human beings? There are men apparently less intelligent than apes. Why then should the man be capitally punished and the ape not brought to trial? And if the ape be made responsible and punishable, why not the dog, the horse, the pig, and the cat?

E.P. Evans  
*The Criminal Prosecution and the  
Capital Punishment of Animals: The  
Lost History of Europe's Animal  
Trials*

### Scenes from a Marriage

Punitur etiam pecus et ambo comburuntur. To Shirley Razo, Latin phrases seemed always to be chiseled in a kind of brown antique authority, which belied their actual significance. Burning at the stake could hardly have been so staid or sanctified an affair. What was the Biblical jargon? "Weeping and gnashing of teeth," yes, that, and a good deal more. A stench of wool garb that not only reeked of sheep in the fields but of all that medieval effluent of humans scrunched together in hovels choked with peat-smoke or in the confines of narrow, sewage-clogged streets. Fear. Sweat. Excitement. Semen. Shedding menses. Dung. And animals herded under heavy skies that did more to keep a lid on the effluvia than to disperse it. The noise too would be cacophonous: street vendors crying their wares, beggars begging, cutpurses and cozeners conniving, the burgeoning hubbub of the mob's gossiping, the shouts of children, the booming pronouncements of the ecclesiastical authorities, the jangles of wandering musicians, asses braying, horses whinnying, dogs barking, the squealing of terrified swine. Cawing crows would be circling overhead and squeaking rats crouching in the crevasses. And of course, the shrieks of the victims, both before and during the festivities, these certainly

would have heightened the crescendo. No — *punitur etiam pecus et ambo comburuntur* was a typical verbal coffin of officialese — like “nuclear deterrence” or “military engagement” — a phrase meant to bury the populace’s flush of alarm, cruelty and/or outrage at these ceremonies cementing together the established order.

The long cylindrical ash of her cigarette hung together miraculously as Shirley, breathless, concentrated on adding another coat of crimson polish to the scarp nail of her great toe. “A fungus,” or so her know-it-all neighbor, Margarethe had said, drawing on her shadowy fund of wartime knowledge. This thickening and warping of the nail was the result of some invisible subversive colony whose crude effects Shirley hoped to mask by this cosmetic subterfuge. ‘Walkin’ barefoot through bird shit in the back,’ she surmised. Margarethe, of course, had urged her to rip the whole thing off. Ouch! But in idle times like these, of which times there were many, and when she was not drunk, of which times there were getting to be quite few, her thoughts now often flamed with more and more of this antique imagery. Cinemagraphic montages really. Full-blown pageants into which she was more or less involuntarily thrust with all of her sensory apparati extravagantly afire. Naturally, she blamed Lovernius. Hadn’t she surrendered her whole life to him, her academic career, her youth, her now time-annihilated beauty? Didn’t he owe her something more than this unwanted spate of madness? After the calamity, her whole world suddenly collapsed into the crater of her husband’s emotions. Or lack thereof. In this barren pit she had desperately sought, but failed to find solace for her anguish. It was not exactly as if she were doting on him. She had done that when they first met in graduate school, hung on his every word, involved herself shamelessly in the conflagration of his brilliance — his eulogies on language and the troubadours that caressed her like the most sensuous foreplay — no, it was not that. But in some way that she could not yet make sense of, it was even more involving. In her grief over their loss, she watched him, watched him as if at any moment he might say or do something magical that would retrieve their daughter from the darkness. His postures, his hand gestures, his breathing patterns, even the arrhythmia of his eyeblinks became her riveting obsession. Somewhere, entombed in him, she knew there must be some companion to her suffering. What she found in there instead surprised, infuriated and entrapped her. As she more closely imitated his every nuance of behavior, that barrier which ordinarily stands opaquely between one person’s thoughts and another’s became transparent. The streams of their separate fantasies had merged, and now, whenever her own mind was left idle, his would intrude. If this was love, it was a detestable kind of love that created its own roiling and acidic orbis forged from the magma of each lover’s terror. If this was love, it was a love that consigned its victims to an imprisonment in a howling dystopia. She knew all about his *fin’amor* at the Sefer Yetzirah and even about his jealousies of that dithering bookstore clerk — their neighbor actually — yet these were but common disturbances — a repeat of his lifelong habit of sexless infatuations with coeds, with which he slathered himself with infamy from time to time. These escapades meant nothing, or so she believed. But there was something else, something darker, more malevolent, and indicative of some disaster that was both personal and communal — some coming apocalypse whose timely instigation required the humble kindling of her husband’s amorous idiocies. And maybe hers as well. Whenever she tried to enter this part of his mind, she was buried in a chaotic welter of hallucinations — basilisks in

scarlet uniforms, smothering membranes of jelly-fish-like cellophane, buzzing reptilian or insect voices as crazy-making as blaring static shearing through the jagged air from Death's own boomboxes. At the perimeter of this bizarre realm, filled, as she sensed, with alien intelligence, hovered a cartoonish balloon of utter annihilation, a rubber dirigible scrawled with enigmatic glyphs whose message was the more terrible because it was indecipherable. That maelstrom was somehow drawing Lovernius into its sphere and away — perhaps permanently away — from her. The toenail, which had been yellow and deformed, was now screaming red, but still deformed. The long cylinder of ash finally fell into her lap. She cocked her head sideways pondering the result of her labors, her face wet again with tears. Was this really an improvement?

*'This is going to be trouble,' he thought, wiping grease from his mouth as he tore at the cold lamb chop he had brought to munch during the entertainment. A little repast on the ramparts of the Abbey while watching the fulfillment of his verdict. Unfortunately, the crowd was recoiling in horror, not clamoring for joy. That idiot poor-excuse for an executioner had interpolated an extra-judicial act, hacking off the mule's hooves before he and his assistants swung the braying body atop the pile of faggots prepared for the holocaust. Even from his post above the fray, the Bishop could see that there was blood everywhere and that the cries of beast and man, ripping the air before the flames had so much as kissed them, were goading the ruckus of the mob beyond its usual frenzy. Instead of being indignant and vindictive, now they were going to bellow in sympathy. "Bunglers," he mumbled darkly, scraping a bone bare between his teeth, then throwing it disgustedly in the general direction of the botched spectacle. He had nothing but impious whoremongers, assiduous gamblers, ruffians, back-biters, thieves and assassins with which to fill these offices, and now he was going to have to defend this latest judiciary usurpation. He knew that the Compté's officials would surely petition him on behalf of the outraged sensibilities of their Lord's benighted vassals. It incensed him that the Compté's charlatans would have the temerity to criticize the mercies of his holy office in the name of the cruelest man ever to infect Christendom. They never missed the slightest opportunity to nettle his and the Church's authority on any perceived pretext of legal violation or moral deviance. A simple case of *offensa cujus nominato crimen est* and now he was going to have to concoct some smarmy excuse. 'The animal was vicious and inclined to kick — *'vitosus et caleitrosus'* — so much rotten meat to placate the Compté's grinning hounds. Pah! It was enough to put a man off his feed! It did not, however, put the Bishop off his. As the ravenous flames quieted both victims and onlookers, the Bishop, gnawing angrily his hunks of lamb, began to ruminare on his options.*

It had something to do, she knew, with Lovernius's curiously punctual, but oddly timed Monday night visits to that house south of the park. In everything else, Lover was completely transparent to her. But here she could not enter. Unseemly as it was — she looked at the snarled red toenail and lamented on how far she had fallen — now she was beginning to toy with the idea of following him. Something she had never stooped to even during the most flagrant of his peccadilloes. 'But,' she thought, blowing on the sticky polish, 'desperate times require desperate measures.' She resolved to leave no stone unturned.

*'Omnem movere lapidem,' thought the Bishop. He had long been looking for an opportunity to confront the Compte for his lenience regarding dualist heresies. And here, in spite of this public humiliation at the hands (or hooves) of a buggered mule, was his chance to take the offensive. This latest abomination, whose perpetrators were now bubbling in their own fat under the holy bonfire, had some interesting crooks in it, which unwound in the direction of a certain village in the Compte's southerly domains. Intercourse between man and beast was common enough in all these hinterlands, but this case stunk, not only of mortal sin, but of heresy as well. For didn't Frere Guillard encourage the man to confess under torture that he believed to be lawfully copulating with his deceased wife? And didn't this same Frere Guillard — 'an alacritous persecutor of God's enemies,' mused the Bishop, smiling — report that the blasphemer had been steeped in this apostasy by some hermit parfait holed up near one of those shepherd villages in the upper Ariège? Evil had been so hydra-headed in Pamiers that the Bishop had been kept busy night and day decapitating the most egregious of its tentacles, but this gavache and his mule passing through Montailou had suddenly alerted his Grace that His Pyrenean enclaves might be spreading their maliciousness downstream, so to speak, to infect the town. Besides, that whole region was notorious for shirking their responsibilities to tithes. The more he thought on this, the more furiously the Bishop masticated his gristle. Yes, the local priest had been slovenly in his collections of revenue, and in addition, he was rumored to be more of a goat than a sheep, an adulterer, in fact, and an indiffernt defender of orthodoxy. This intolerable dereliction of the duties of holy office must be cauterized. The Bishop had the divine intuition that there were secrets hidden in those hills whose revelations would strengthen his authority and bring the Compte to heel. Perhaps it was time that an agent of His Grace should descend upon this snakebed of Catharists and Catharist sympathizers. Smoke was coiling into the low clouds and darkening them almost to the color of the circling corbies, but the Bishop's mood had considerably brightened. He thought of the tall, wiry body and the red, equine face of Frere Guillard — 'a most punctilious servant of the Lord, who does not shy from attacking the most militant of his duties with a conscientious and stinging zeal . . .'*

### **Blue Syzygy**

We notice, after the clearing, how day's  
Blue nature begets a multitude of blues,  
Blue jewels upon the shadow-side of trees,  
Under the wings of birds, on water's mirrors.  
So many lovers of the new-made morning  
Coming to mix their sapphires in the eye.  
Perhaps despair was never part of nature.  
Perhaps these endless couplings of the light  
Always brought love to earth and touch to heaven.  
Perhaps each kiss was always day's new Christ,  
Pressing his body to the Magdalene.