

3/5/01 Monday's Rock, Sandro Lingam  
Closing time: 10:22 p.m., C.S.T.

True jealousy always causes love to grow. (the 21<sup>st</sup> rule)

A suspicion about your lover causes jealousy and ardor to increase. (the 22<sup>nd</sup> rule)

The smallest supposition compels the lover to imagine the worst about his {or her} beloved. (the 28<sup>th</sup> rule)

Andreas Capellanus (attrib.)

### Art of Loving

A Medieval Text should never be read on its own. What it conceals can be surprising. A meandering course is as necessary for critics as errantry is for knight adventurers.

Charles Méla

### *La Reine et le Graal*

#### The Trials of Inquisitors

*As the two clerics from Pamiers prodded their asses up the steep, they first passed an outcropping of rocks and a little chapel dedicated to the Virgin, then the cemetery, then the first houses built close together to form Montailou's defensible wall. The black clad figures entered the portal, followed warily by the eyes of housewives that gleamed like cinders from the dark cloisters of their domiciles. Dirty, shoulder-humping dogs barked and slunk growling behind the worried donkeys, while panicked, squealing pigs crisscrossed the village's one rutted, curving road, which laboriously crawled passed the parish church to die at the gates of the looming, unkempt chateau. Frere Guillard and his assistant, Pons, however, dismounted at the church, where Frere Guillard, undaunted, returned the snarls of the riled dogs, but not the nervous smiles of the village priest who hastened from the rectory to greet him. The sun was high, the sky bright, and the shadows made blue passages on the pink and white and golden stones. This appearance of the inquisitor and his assistant prompted no sudden flight of crows, no eclipse, no outward omen announcing a coming calamity, but when Guillemette heard the commotion, she felt a chill icing her spine and crossed herself. Esclarmonde, Guillemette's youngest daughter, tottered out of the house to join the only mother she had ever known, pushing her tiny fists into her eyes to erase the last bright vestiges of sleep. The little girl stomped her bare feet in the garden's mud, as if, by standing in one place, she might march to the center of the earth, then she looked up at Guillemette and said:*

*The sky is clear.  
But smoke is black.*

*The end is nigh, alas, alack!*

*One tear cut through the grime of Guillemette's still handsome cheek and she whispered hurriedly, but fervently: "Virgo potens, ora pro nobis. Rosa Mystica, ora pro nobis."*

Nondescript rows of cinderblock houses, shadowy and black as they drew back from the intermittent amber street lamps, squatted in the smells of petrol, Saguaros, Ocotillos, Prickly Pear, Cholla, sweet citrus in bloom. No one about at this time of night, but a few dogwalkers, quieter than the first faint stars. The street is lined with cars, and there's no particular reason to notice that two of them, parked not so far from each other, are his and her models of identical large, white American sedans. One is empty, but the other contains a figure, which would have tumbled as deeply into the darkness as the not-so-distant silhouette of South Mountain, except for the orange tip of a lit cigarette, which hangs head-high in the space behind the wheel. Ascending towards the Milky Way, thin, white threads of smoke escape through the cracked driver's side window. It is 9:22 p.m., Mountain Standard Time, and Shirley Razo has just watched as her husband disappeared into one of the houses, a man, to her relief — and confusion — greeting Lovernius at the door. Odd. But it fit the pattern of her spouse's recent behaviors — could such idiosyncrasies be said to exhibit a pattern: haunting the Scottsdale herbarium or locking himself in the bathroom at night, and — if her ruined nasal passages did not deceive her, of all things — smoking. He had been ragging on her for forty years to quit. She counted her cigarettes. If he were smoking, he was smoking O.Ps, not hers, although she had the unsettling intuition that her smokes had been handled and then placed back into the package, as she perceived that her cancer sticks were not much, but a little crunched, a little crinkled. But she thought, anyway, that it was not tobacco smoke, nor any kind of dope that she could recognize. His turning on the shower could not completely dissipate an odor that seemed to exude the unusual, acidic and nose-scrunching obnoxiousness of something akin to 'burning pee.' Finally, there were these strangely timed Monday night excursions to this neighborhood with its back pushed up against the culverted canal beyond which stretched the domesticated desert of Papago Park. Odd, too, that in spite of the warmth of the evening, a pallid smoke plumed from one of the vents on the roof of the house. Shirley noted the address. She could fit it into the deposition later when she queried her husband about his unorthodox devotions.

*He had finished another day of tantalizing and confusing depositions, and was mortified at having again lost his temper. Rushing at a witness, he had tripped over his Friar's skirts, and then, to the muffled delight of the witnesses, gone sprawling like a pig in mud across the floor of the makeshift jury room. Now he was alone on a black hillside, somewhere on the uplands outside of the village, above and beyond the last of the cultivated plots. He stood at the edge of a little copse, its branches and leaves shredded by vicious winds. The winds seemed to be filled with contradictory voices, all vying for his attention, all lying. His frock beat fiercely about him, and he could hear its crooked seams ripping as they gave way to the strain. Suddenly a huge gust tumbled him down the hill and jerked off the remains of his tattered frock. Now he rolled and rolled and rolled, bruised and torn by every rock and thistle, until he came to rest, at long last, naked, in the pigsty bordering Guillemette's garden. Esclarmonde tottered out of the*

*house, pushing her tiny fists into her eyes to erase the last bright vestiges of sleep. She was stomping on the ground and chanting “Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, et in hora mortis nostrae.” From inside the house, Guillemette’s throaty voice scolded: “Hey! Get back in here! You little fool! You turnip! You noble peapod!” He had a tremendous erection and the crushing humiliation of his obscenely exposed condition squeezed his gut with an implacable, gnawing hunger. Coarse red hair was spouting all over his body and as an inarticulate growl erupted from his throat, he could think of one thing and one thing only: attacking and eating the child.*

“Odd” was not only a descriptor enveloping her husband. Shirley was aware that whatever was happening to him had included her in its vapor cloud as well, and that along with these entrainments, which brought her out into the desert night to scry on proceedings that were shielded from her understanding, if not her gaze, there were these strange foldings and unfoldings of consciousness that creased her timeline and reversed or crumpled its direction: an unseen entity making hawks, doves, crows, swans from her normally flat and paperlike perceptions, and then wadding up the origami and setting them aflame. She awakened with the ashes of her newly lit cigarette on her lap and its pea of orange fire scooping out the nasty-tasting filter. Startled, she did not at first realize where she was, and then, alarmed that she might have missed the very thing that she had come to see, she checked the cinderblock house with its steamy plume of smoke, and then the space where Lovernius’s car had only a moment before been parked. Someone else, a hulking young man in a Red Devil’s athletic T-shirt, was now standing in the lit doorway of the house. This new visitor or denizen was greeted by the mysterious man, and the white sedan was gone. “Shit! Shit! Shit!” She started the car, the squeal of a dry power steering belt slicing into the desert night like the whine of a tortured dog, the tires of the big sedan matching the howl tone for godawful tone as they smeared a screeching donut of burnt rubber on the asphalt. In the Park, scorpions and burrowing spiders were jolted from their doze under rocks and from pencil-thin holes. A diamondback rattler — cool and nearly comatose under a sandstone ledge — nervously flicked its tongue. Jackrabbits twitched their long, veiny, nearly hairless ears. Startled birds shivered on their cacti-roosts, and a coyote, having loped in from the Indian reservation to scavenge garbage pails and hunt cats, lifted his scruffy head to the moonless skies and returned an answering croon.

*The rectory’s windows were not quite large enough to toss a cat through, although with perfect aim you might be able to pitch a rat out of one of them, if he wasn’t one of the bigger fellows like those that loped along the mud gutters of Montailou’s lone street, fattening on the random garbage that didn’t get fed to pigs or piled in compost. The stretched cow bladder was only slightly more translucent than the stone wall anyway, and Frere Guillard, sweating profusely after his nightmare, was still pretty confused about where he was and what he was doing here, the amount of pre-dawn light, or paucity thereof, that managed to squeeze into the darkened chamber only exacerbating his disorientation. The good Father’s default position in these cases was to scream the name of his assistant, the hapless Pons, which he did, setting the dogs in the village, who had, over the weeks, not altered their original shady opinion of the Inquisitor, to raising hell again. Pons, ever alacritous in his response, came running in with the fat squib of a*

*candle, which smoked up the small room with tallow stench, and did not, for all its commotion, add much in the way of illumination. Pons, deferential to his superior to the point of worshipful idolatry — Frere Guillard was powerful, Pons was not — sidled up to his personal God, as he always did, more than a little jittery and head shy. He knew, or rather the welts on his noggin and the bruises on his butt attested, that Frere Guillard, although certainly a man of mercy, was not one to be toyed with. The zealous Father freely applied the rod, a righteous smack up the side of the head or a kick in the seat of the sackcloth often serving as his prods to prompt more devotional service. Obedience, to Frere Guillard, being the pin upon which even the Cardinal Virtues hinged. Still, Pons always thought that the Inquisitor, in fighting so much with the Accuser, had had a bit of the Sigillum Diaboli branded into his own character and tactics as well. Never wrestle with a pig, as the saying goes. Nathless, the prudent Pons, steeled by fortitude, tried his best to be inwardly temperate, even in his private opinions, of his superior's search for justice. Pons tied his faith to the staff of charity, and hoped against hope that mercy would win out in Frere Guillard's moral universe. In the meantime, he had learned to duck. Unfortunately, not all of the Inquisitor's respondents had assimilated that lesson. Nobody had been found guilty of anything yet in Montailou, but there were already casualties: some when Frere Guillard had ripped a plank from the jurist's table and started felling nearby respondents, a few more teeth missing, hunks of hair and hide lopped off, but nothing permanently debilitating. There was, however, the one indirect fatality, which occurred that time when the defender of orthodoxy bit an evasive witness on the shoulder, the man dying two days later from lockjaw. Not to imply that there was any foulness in Frere Guillard's mouth. A consequence of the man's own unwashed body, and God's will, to be sure, but the incident was a bad omen for the investigation, insofar as it sent the villagers running for help to their despotic matriarch, that witchy heretic, Guillemette. She was a wily one to be sure. Sorceress, midwife, procurer, herbalist, moneylender —she seemed to have plenty of past markers to collect and a degree of leverage with the villagers that threatened the success of the proceedings. There was no doubt that the respondents considered her the odds on favorite to beat the Lord's representative in any game that involved on one side mere intimidation and threat, and on the other, those weapons, plus so many lurid enticements that they made Pons shudder to think about them. That was Pons's humble observation, at least, but not one that he dared mention to his idol. Pons was indeed humble, maybe even a bit naïve, but he was not a complete fool. He had witnessed the effects of fire on human flesh, and he knew better than to be lumped by association on the page of the Book where the Father listed those apostates whose accommodations he had reserved in hell.*

Mad as hell, Shirley Razo ramrodded her big-assed car down the asphalt ribbon that split the dark center of Papago Park, the suspension of the four-door sorely strained by a couple of tons of steel having adopted an opposing humping pattern to that of the heat-warped road. She was still faunching and spitting at having missed Lovernius's departure, eyes streaming in the blast of full-bore air-conditioning, as her rubber-thonged foot with its painted scarp nails crushed the gas peddle into the firewall. She was bouncing up and down on the seat as if she were riding in a boat planing across the tops of choppy waves, her bouffant crushing itself into the headliner with every new thump. Then it happened. Something in the front end gave way, the wheels splayed sideways,

and the big machine highcentered, tearing out its oilpan, and hemorrhaging a slick of 10W-40 across the road and for several hundred feet, plowing the desert and whacking off some ironwood shrub and prickly pear before digging itself into the red earth and nosing to a halt in a cloud of steam and dust. But Shirley was perfectly calm now, even happy. She had only missed joining Amadée and freeing herself from Lovernius by just that much. She got out of the car, and without surveying the damage, or being the least concerned about it, she scraped a heap of dirt off the hood with her flabby, bare forearm, made herself a spot to perch, and hoisted her butt up for a sit-down and a smoke. The night was stygian ink. And when the dust settled and the steam dispersed, there was nothing to attract the attention of passers-by but the tiny orange dot of her Camel, slowly inching down the white column towards an impassive face, both dirt and make-up caked, and streaked with desiccated tears.

*The darkness and smoke in the room infuriated Frere Guillard, who, adopting the direct approach, as was his want, leapt over to the window, and punched a hole with his fist in the smudgy cow bladder. It was a red morning, which presaged a coming storm, but the light and wind poured into the room with enough force to extinguish the cabbage head of the smoky squib, and to cause the poor blinded Pons to blink as if his face had just been doused with blood. It was bad start to the day, Pons knew, and things only careened downhill when the Father demanded that he summarize — extempore — what they had uncovered so far in the depositions. Pons was loath to do this, but Frere Guillard bellowed: “Speak, knave, or taste the Mercy of the Lord’s wrath.” Pons, therefore, having no desire to enjoy such a boon, began his rambling summation.*

*“Arnaud says that Alazais was hereticated by the parfait who camps in the hidden canyon, and that she prays to the pile of stones outside the Virgin’s chapel, and not in the chapel itself. But Sybil says that Arnaud was jilted by Alazais in favor of his son, the absent Phillipe, and that he (Arnaud) schemed to get even with her for betraying him and fornicating with the he-goat, Bernard. Yet Bernard claims that he is innocent of fornication with anyone, except for his lawful wife, Bernice, and that it was Sybil who was jilted by Arnaud, and who had sworn vengeance upon him, when he — Bernard — denounced him — Arnaud — to Pierre for stealing his — Pierre’s — pig. Pierre denies that Arnaud ever tried to steal his pig, but swears that Bernard loves Alazais, who will have nothing to do with him — Bernard — and who loves Arnaud’s son, now gone away to study for the priesthood . . .”*

*Frere Guillard indicated his desire that this exposition should be terminated with a cry of “Enough!” punctuated by a quick left/right boxing of the secretary’s already swollen ears. The subsequent ringing left Pons with little capacity to understand the ensuing imprecations, although the temporarily deafened assistant had no doubt that the merciful Frere was beseeching divine aid in bringing all of these malefactors to heel. It was however a long sermon, and when the bells died down, the crackling of its flames could be heard racing from this cramped chamber and into all the domiciles of Montaillou.*

*“It’s that she-demon, Guillemette who has fomented this rebellion! It is she whose pyre I will use to burn every man, woman and child in this village!” And hearing the dogs start*

*up again at the sound of his shouting, the Inquisitor added: "And all of their tainted beasts, too!"*

*Pons was awake enough now to be alarmed. "The infants, too?"*

*"Yes! Kill them all. Let God sort them out."*

*"And the donkeys?" Pons had a soft spot for asses.*

*"Yes, we must destroy the village in order to save it."*

*"But, Father, the Bishop cannot collect tithes from the damned, and how will he feed his sheep in Pamiers if we slaughter them all here and deny them the salvation that comes to those who give their mites to the Lord."*

*A good head feint saved the wary Pons from a right hook, but it was clear that his intromission had punched a hole in the merciful Father's vision of a final solution.*

*"This heretic will not cost me a Bishop's Crook! She has her finger in every devil's pie in the parish and it is she who will lead me through this web of her own trickery where I will find the most succulent hens to pluck and fry!"*

*These kinds of mixed metaphors were common in Frere Guillard's more impassioned pronouncements. But Pons was grateful that his superior's temper had cooled sufficiently enough to forgo physical violence in favor of that which was only semantic, although he had an itch in the back of his brain that told him that the two kinds of mayhem were probably evil twins.*

*"Pons! We must pray!" And here the holy legate grabbed his assistant by the collar and cast him to his knees. In the next instant, Frere Guillard had squeezed his own tearful eyes closed and was choking the crucifix on his beads with fervent, trembling hands:*

*Frere Guillard: Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O living, O sweet Virgin Mary. Amen. . . Pons!*

*Pons: Pray for us most holy mother of God!*

*Frere Guillard: That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Virgin of incarnation, a thousand times we greet thee, a thousand times we praise thee for thy joy when God was incarnated in thee. Because thou art so powerful a Virgin and Mother of God, grant what we ask of thee for the love of God. That we may root out with fire and truth those who have betrayed the teachings of the Church. That we may not stint nor*

*soften in our quest for justice, nor respect any person, nor stoop to pity any corrupted, mortal flesh. That the gibbets of our devotion be hung with the fruits of our divine duty. That thou shouldst place in our loving hands a rod of iron that we may dash thine enemies in pieces like a potter's vessel. O grant that we may take joy in our heavy responsibilities, and experience on our own flesh the blessings of thy presence. . . Pons!*

*Pons: Pray for us most holy mother of God!*

*Both: Amen!*

In the most leisurely fashion, Shirley smoked one cigarette, and then another, and then a third, the stars on this moonless night, patiently multiplying and slowly turning above the dark desert floor. She thought of herself as a young woman again, with a young woman's beauty, a young woman's dreams. The memories of those first times with Lovernius, tender and warm and wild, were languidly swirling through her body, like vapor undulating in most delicate spirals through a most delicate glass vessel. Around her, in the park, scorpions and burrowing spiders returned to doze under rocks and in cozy, pencil-thin holes. A diamondback rattler under a sandstone ledge drew a long breath through the coils of his long body, then returned to the cool stillness of his repose. Jackrabbits nuzzled their sensitive, veiny ears in the fur along their backs and closed their bright, black eyes. Birds settled quietly back to sleep on their cacti-roosts. And a coyote, having noticed this strange new presence in the landscape, slunk close to the dormant car and peaceful woman, lifting his scruffy head to inhale the aromatic scent of tobacco.

*Pons opened his eyes, slowly, furtively, and through the fist hole in the rectory window, he saw the most amazing sight: a female figure, about three feet tall, had materialized in the crimson lightshaft at about a forty-five degree angle from the roughhewn flagstone floor. She wore a blue mantel and had a beautiful, white, smiling face, somewhat soiled, however, and streaked with tears. Frere Guillard's eyes were still closed, but her tiny white hand floated down to touch him, not on his heart, but, to Pons's utter astonishment, in a lower place. The Inquisitor's body rhythmically convulsed five or six times, and then fell sideways in a faint. Terrified, Pons leapt to his master's aid, but as he drew his face close to his mentor's, Frere Guillard's eyes opened and his hand shot out, grabbing Pons's shabby collar and drawing his assistant's terrified visage nose to nose with his own. Frere Guillard's face was distorted with fury, the impurpled veins on his forehead dangerously distended. Through clenched teeth, the Inquisitor spat at his servant: "Hast thou seen the vision?! Hast thou felt the coming of our joy?! When his throat was released, Pons fell back smack on his butt on the flags. Indeed. Indeed, he had.*

### **The Inquisitor's Song**

All those with an heretical cast of mind,  
Who seek, among the brambles of sharp truth,  
The hidden and rejected and despised  
As objects of their worship and their love —  
For you we have reserved a special hatred,

Excruciating punishments, pains devised  
For the end of the world, and cruelties mapped out  
On sensitive tissues, the hells of acid  
And the hells of fire. For you have dared to love  
What we have hated. Your breath tears holes in our  
Constructed armor, from which we bleed the  
The majesty of our errors. You show God's tenderness,  
Joy's tolerance. How can we let you live?

3/12/01 Monday's Rock, Sandro Lingam

Closing time: 9:11 p.m., C.S.T.

We do not possess imagination enough to sense what we are missing.

Jean Toomer and Rudolph P. Byrd  
*Essentials*

When Lovernius Razo slipped his white sedan into the double carport of his Golden Keys condo, he was relieved to find its mate missing. Shirley's night journey to the convenience store for cancer sticks or wassail, or so he believed, would spare him the tedium of repeating his fidelity oath. The sharpened point of her inquisition would be parried, at least until after his baptism in the psychic pool of his theogens, and he could make a leg to her then. His plan? Steal huggger-muggger through the darkened house to the bathroom and partake of the paddock juice that he had just scored from Dr. Lawson. Interesting man, though he had noisome eructations. Lovernius did not really see, he had to admit, how these excursions to the hinterlands of the star fields were going to allow him to enter the pavilion of Etty Kaplan's loose-bodied gown, but the journeys themselves, so laden as they were with Death's codpoles and tame-cheaters, immersed him in the dangerous pleasures of errantry. Reluming the bathroom and unleashing the shower, he wondered what dragons would breathe upon his heart tonight, what basilisks might intrude with the hurly-burly of their forbidden knowledge? As he performed his obligatory, bladder-emptying absolutions, his beveled penis lantrified his cuisses. But no matter. In a moment the jesses that bound him to the leather arm of earthly flesh would be loosened, the bewits chime, and the horologe would open its implacable face as his hawk-sails winged wide into an eternity wondrous strange. His hands shook as he loaded the glass pipe, but this was no impeachment to his purpose. Sitting on the battened-down seat of the commode, he prepared himself to endure whatever new humors of forty fancies might assail him as he sojourned. The usual rush of forked and hornéd amphibians ensued, the thunders of murdering pieces, but he had been Jack-a-Lent to these pummels before, and he endured this fresh havoc manfully. Now he was jauncing through Death's own knotted landscape, but in a trice, there would be surcease to these calamities and he bid fair the chances that he might see his Kicky-Wicky. But, alas, this notte, it was not to be. Instead he unclewed this:

*Following his revelatory dream and vision, Frere Guillard de Pamiers hatched out a plan of disguise and deception, which he felt was divinely inspired by the visitation of the*

*Holy Virgin. The merciful Father sought the glee-gold-fawning of Pons's echoing agreement to his emprises, and to this purpose he bespoke his schemes aloud.*

*Frere Guillard: Assuredly I shall call these feculent treachers to account for their deceits. They shall grovel with obeisance to the sacring-bell or gibber in bonefiers like those scabby carriers of Serpigo.*

*Pons: But, Father, what shall we do?*

*Frere Guillard (with derision and a cuff on the back of his underling's head): Pons, thou hast a lurkish mind, lumpish and slow. Thou must take heed, lest Modo scourge thee for thy dullness. But list and stand amazed. Maugre these machinations of the she-devil Guillemette, I mean to confound these rudesbies with the maisterdome of a masking disguise. Theirs are but middling minds, darkened in the smoky dungeons of heretical fancies, no match for our colorable genius. Betake thee to thy quarters and pack thy parcels, we shall esloyne these environs and that eftsoones*

*Pons (having trouble following the brilliance of his superior's argument): Pardon, Father?*

*Frere Guillard (impatiently): Pons thou art a dumpish drudge, a droyle, a slave. A-reed me right: I mean to depart Montailou attonce.*

*Pons: But, Your Merciful, His redoubted Grace, the most Holy Bishop of Pamiers has charged us to subdue these heretics. I doubt not that He shall be most stomachous at our premature return, and divert the sword of his wrath from these wretches to ourselves.*

*Frere Guillard (backinghanding Pons in the gut and doubling him breathless): Why thou fatuous miscreant. Cans't thou not espy my draught?*

*Pons: Oh, by your Holiness's mercy, thy light is darksome to me.*

*Frere Guillard: Then I shall illuminate it for thee, lest thy misweene thy part in this affair, and bring our plot to naught. Dost thou gesse that I would fetch this holy body back to Pamiers, flaggy and greifull, out at my stocking heals, cozened by these insolent rustics, content to be martyrizd by the fat Bishop, and lose the crook myself?*

*Pons: Pardon, Good Father, forgive the opacity of my understanding, and pity me for God's fool. I am clay to thy sunlike rays.*

*Frere Guillard: This is an obstinance that I have regretted in thee, and mean to correct, if needs be, with the cudgel. But I shall be plain: we shall despoil our persons of these robes of office and assume new mantels of disguisement, returning to intermeddle with these heretical kernes as figures other than ourselves.*

*Like all those cast by history into positions of subservience, Pons nourished a lively and accurate outpicturing of events engendered by his persecutors. Daw that he felt himself to be, he kenned vividly the future of his copesmate's designs, and saw full well that the wind about to be sewn would harvest a hurricano. They had terrorized this small, close village for weeks, daily and arrogantly pressing the brand of their unwanted visages into the sconceflesh of villagers enlaced by filial bonds which had been woven for generations. All strangers invited the most assiduous scrutiny, and Pons feared greatly that their mere bedighting of themselves in counterfeit cloaks would be more apt to subject them to the villagers' devices than to enable them to enact their own. Gibbets and flames tortured the clerk's vision, his own dogsbody dangling from the first and deforming in the second. Respectful as he was to his superior, this design afflicted him sore, and he deemed it wise to attempt to deflect the Good Father's abusion, lest its execution lead to his own. But how? Thus, delaying, yet fretful, he spoke not. Albeit his brow denounced him.*

*Frere Guillard: Thy face betrays thee, Pons, thou art astonied.*

*Pons: Only at thy brilliance, Father. But I fear me that these boist'rous heretics are cunning, and may nathless see what we are feign to obscure.*

*Frere Guillard: Does thou balke words with me?! Dare to bandy phrases?! Thou clatterfart equivocator! We shall change our gaits, our accents, besmear our complexions with the blood of berries and return in the guise of parfais. Our depositions have gifted us with close knowledge of these Manichean practices. We will minister to them with their own heretical sacraments, and incriminate them with our own testimonies. Not one shall escape the snare. Not one slip the springe of our orthodox cleansing flames!*

*Frere Guillard had reached a pinnacle of ecstasy by the period of this exposition, the thought of burning heretics warming as always his Church-loving heart. And Pons was much afear'd to see his master's s face glowing thus with apoplectic splendor in the dark cloister, the good Father's eyes, gouged into his long, equine head, as vivid-orange as embers on a hearthgrate. What dread vision rose up in futurity, its fires ranging over the surface of their folly, raking forth retribution, harassing to death mortal flesh?*

Lovernius lept into these bonfires, as a man might dive into the depths of trauma. But this trauma had weird glints and angles to it. This was time's bubble-glass blazoned with streams of letters, each letter an influenza of star-fluid, within which luminous fish-like bodies joined in a school with others, mysteries muchell great and dancing a-point with diamond flashes. Did he actually see Pons and Frere Guillard, hear them speaking to one another, or was his knowledge derived from a magical book, a spate of words captured upon the tissue-parchment of his physical brain as the effluent of neurotransmitters? Or more outrageous, was his own body now nothing more than a river of words, his bones and skin, his longing for the touch of Etty Kaplan's erotic zones, were these implacable affects but the epiphenomenon of language, stories more than twice-told, echoing through countless readers' skulls and making his fictional self a gesticulation of swarming

molecules, an unreal thing made real, not by some laborious process of material evolution, but by a convocation of minds in the thrall of words? Enthroned on the sealed commode, with the shower running on no one, its needles diving nowhere, the lights above the vanity too dimmed by his inner sight to make an appearance, Lovernius had entered a realm between the feckless fanciful and the obnoxiously solid, a realm where the white smoke from his toad milk combined with the fog of the prickling shower and made a probability cloud in which the latticed walls of time were tuned to the velocity of glass, where he, like a child looking into a toyshop in midwinter, might wipe his breath from the partition, see through the opaque moment, and skry eternity. There was a certain pleasure in this practice, and yet it was a pleasure saturated with risk. To see what he saw, hear what he heard of the fabled Land of Oc was a lithesome joy, however hard the matter. But to bring to this transparence the monstrosity of the present, aye, and to spy that grappling malignity, was to massacre what was lithesome and be harried by the deformation of his own life and the people who haunted it. He longed to see his *fin'amor*, and prayed to his toad masters, and even to the Blesséd Virgin, for such a grace. But instead he saw Shirley, seated on the nosed-down hood of the car, the desert skies wheeling above her, their lights mixing with the light of her cigarette, their silence instilling her silence. Perhaps — he weened — she was not at the Circle K after all.

For the heart, dear reader, whose sack, swollen by longing or grief, finds no trench too deep that its suspicions cannot plumb, but like those tiny creatures scouring the far-down darks and colds of the sea, it sprouts its own tentacles of illumination, seeing farther than the artificers of the city, who have laid so much of nature waste with the destroying hand of their blind, rank commerce. Lovernius, armed thus with second sight, spied his leman of old, atop the sedan, a small flame dancing over a face no longer flushed with tipling, but calm. Yet, soft! Hath not the dragon of the roaring V-8 now quieted its infernal internal combustion, resting dormant beneath her, the metal throne to her entraining quietude? Hath not the very creatures of the wild becalmed themselves in her presence? The stinging scorpion, the ambushing spider, the treacherous serpent, all placid now in the lunar spread of her aura, the nervous hare dreaming calmly, its long ears asleep in its fur, the jittery birds, unruffled on their roosts. Yea, even the ravenous coyote, statue-entranced at her feet, had muzzled his harmless fangs, his rapaciousness subdued in the lacey net or her tobacco smoke. Seeing her thus, Lovernius harkened back to days of yore, when his beldame was fresh and fair. He sighed for so much sweetness lost, the boils and ulcers that had accumulated during their long espousal, much eased, his heart's hard pump made pliant, its sharp spleen purged. Ah. Ah. But buds of spring bloom not in winter's dreere. His mind's apocrypha chanced upon that babe in her bearing blanket, fruit of both their loins, now stolen by Jesu's hand to heaven, or limbo or — God's mercy forestall His justice! — seeing the questionable manner of her doom — in Pandemonium's devouring fires! Hai!

And thus grieving, other sight crept over Lovernius, a tall man, mickle gaunt, his cloven feet shod in skins of reptile and sharpened with argent points, his head made high with the hempen headwear of one who herds kine, hawks' feather's splayed on its crown. He sported himself in maroon leisure suit of polyester, his throat pendant with a mighty amulet figured cunningly with turquoise and silver-seeming nickel in shape of

thunderbird. Lecherous devise teemed in this knight's bony bosom, made yet more choleric by the late rebuke of a comely beldam of Teutonic visage, cunning in her provocations to arouse and to disappoint. Thus Tal Llewellyn, for so this caitiff was hight, sanguine of visage, stormed out of that necromancer's trading cavern, eclipt the Crystal Caldron (such place much hated by Lovernius as the environ of his rival to Eddy Kaplan's graces) and into the desert dark. Thus by fatal chance, or by workings Divine too mirke for mortal view, Tal's return sojourn to his black castle wended its lonely way through the wilds of Papago Park, that desert waste now soothed to brief respite from its depredations by one baptized Shirley, entranced by starlight and nicotine, yet now possible prey to a churl's fraud or rapine.

Lovernius rued him of that sight, his heavy bowels smarting with husband's jealousy, so that the commode seat he lifted. Fetched forth by sorrow from his enchantment, Lovernius did him sit, stripped of the weeds of his lower moiety, his pants downfallen to his ankles, finding — Ah — an gaseous relief, beyond any promulgated by leeches or pothecaries. Praise be to God for the blessing of the shower, for odiferous Tulpas sought to smite him sore, yet were they by the Salt River Authority's pumping station and the cunning artifice of plumbing, prevented.

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” Mad as hell, Tal Llewellyn ramrodded his haul-ass muscle car down the asphalt ribbon that split the dark center of Papago Park, the suspension of the GTO sorely strained by a ton and a half of steel having adopted an opposing humping pattern to that of the heat-warped road. Still faunching at having missed nailing that new client — “had her in the booth, alone after hours, too!” — amber teeth grinding in the blast of full-bore air-conditioning, Tal stomped the gas peddle with his pointy-toed cowboy boot, mashing it into the firewall. He was bouncing up and down on the seat as if he were riding in a boat planing across the tops of choppy waves. Then it happened. Boom! A front tire blew, pierced by a bolt from Shirley Razo's now disabled sedan. The roadster swerved right and left, fishtailed out of control, and spun round 180°, while Tal's boot instinctively but unwisely gunned the gas. Thus the Casanova's mount three-wheeled it in the groove of Shirley's wake, clomping over uprooted ironwood shrub and prickly pear before digging itself into red earth and nosing to a halt in a cloud of exhaust and dust. A coyote bolted, birds squawked, rabbits leapt, and serpents, spiders, scorpions panicked and slithered for cover. But Shirley Razo, in sultry impassivity, only blinked slowly through her cat-eyed glasses. Although the great dragon had exhaled its final breath scant inches from her couch, the damsel, as if awaiting Death, did not budge. Tal — his heart pounding, his leisure suit dampened by inadvertent emissions, unfolded his wiry body shakily from his spearéd, varnished car. As he raised himself uncertainly to his full 6 foot, 6 inch height, the beldame hailed him breathily, exuding an erotically fetching plume of smoke. “Hello, Cowboy,” she crooned, in the dust on the carhood to cold death crushing her Camel. Tal doffed his dented hat, and darkness plunged round them in the desert waste.

*Historiographers, informed by visionary sensitivities, and appointed by the Council and Collective to engrave all famous acts, the wise not content to allow matters of such great import to languish untrumpeted or hobble into public marred by scribblers of fiction or in*

*words close-crabbed to opacity by parasitical pedants, made provision for the dubious departure of Frere Guillard and Pons, recording in their annals their deceitful doings.*

*Renouncing their molestations with fervid fanfare, the Inquisitors dispersed their adjudications and dismissed the witnesses. Much noise made they as they wound back down the mountain, astraddle their humble asses, clop-clopping down the town's one rutted, curvéd street, exiting the shadow of the unkempt Chateaux, seemingly unannoyed by the squealing pigs criss-crossing their path, unperturbed by the barking, dirty, shoulder-humping dogs, unwavering in the stare of housewives, the embers of whose suspicious eyes burned into them as they rode past the village's dark, close-quartered domiciles. The sun was high and bright, and the shadows made blue passages on the pink and white and golden stones. Through the portal of the defensible wall they rode them, their black frocks fluttering in the breeze, brothers to ravens startled into flight, a lone cloud eclipsing the morning sun as they passed first the cemetery, then the outcropping of stones, then the little chapel dedicated to the Virgin. Frere Guillard saw not the small figure hanging in midair athwart the chapel, but Pons, humblywise, turned to this hovering radiance, and with breath directed soundlessly into his coarse-clothed cowl, offered his frightened orison: "Pray for us most Holy Mother of God!"*

### **False Love and True**

By stating the imperfection of our thoughts,  
Describing the thatch of our roofs, the mud of our walls,  
By taking inventory of our furnishings,  
Displacing the rocks and trees, saying that it is ink  
That speaks, and not our voices, we sleep in the bed  
Of things, alone with objects, pining for one  
To love — for one — for the perfection of  
Solitude, for the trees and rocks, for the hum  
Of waters, the cries of birds, for the steepes of words,  
For the finding of perfection in ourselves.