

DO YOU REMEMBER THE SCENE IN THE GODFATHER WHERE JAMES
CAAN SAYS, "NOW MAKE SURE THAT THE GUN GETS STASHED
IN THE REST ROOM — I DON'T WANT MY KID BROTHER
WALKING OUT OF THERE WITH NOTHING BUT HIS DICK IN
HIS HAND"?

because i knew i would be walking her
through some of the meaner night streets
of downtown l.a., i reached in my glove compartment
and slipped a fold-back knife in my pocket.
and we did run the gamut of some fairly unsavory
concentrations of humanity, but as each potentially
tense encounter approached, i patted my pocket
and felt a little less naked.

safely back in the car
i extracted the weapon from my pocket
and found us both gazing at
a b-flat harmonica accidentally filched,
years ago, from one of fred voss's
dodecaphonic parties.

I CAUGHT MYSELF ABOUT TEN HOURS TOO LATE

i was bitching at my students
over the decline of skills and knowledge
in the last two decades
and the parallel decline in public support
of education, and, desiring to bolster my argument
with statistics, i fairly shouted,

"do you realize
that in percent of income spent on education
california now ranks
51st of the 52 states?!"

THE EVERLASTING "RIGHT ON!"

at the gala poetry reading
a guy reads a poem
about the feminine aspects of his personality,
and afterwards the emcee comes on stage
and says, "it was very courageous of you
to read that poem."

which is absolute bullshit.
ninety percent of the people in attendance
are women and gays.
if someone read a poem
in defense of the deployment
of cruise missiles in belgium

or in praise of ronald reagan
or jerry falwell or anita bryant
or someone like that,

now that would take a little courage.

but it won't be me for two reasons:

(1) i can't find much of a defense
for the above, and

(2) the people i'd be offending would know
i was just trying to offend them.

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LITERATURE

she asks me, "what does one say
about proust?"

i tell her, "one says that the difficulties
in reading him result from his coming
at the tail-end of the ciceronian-miltonic
rhetoric of amplification — the periodic
sentence and the homeric simile — compounded
by his connections with the symbolist-modernist
logic of synaesthesia and associational recollection."

she says, "if i memorize that
will it get me a ph.d.?"

"no," i tell her, "but it will sure shut up
a lot of people at your next cocktail party."

PIGEONHOLED

"you're not a catholic anymore, are you?"
she asks.

"yes," i say, "i have the indelible sacramental
marks of baptism, confirmation, and matrimony
on my soul. in fact, i did the matrimony bit
three times, but only the first one makes
the mark."

"still, you don't go to church anymore, do you?"

"no," i say, "i don't go to church anymore."

"i know what you are," she exults,
"you're an existentialist!"