

A Personal Memory of Bill Everson

By Geoffrey Dunn

Autumn, 1975. Kresge College, UCSC. Hot, auspicious. You remember the way he moved, the shuffle of his moccasins against the stage, the way he materializes as if from a cloud. A silver-white mane and beard surround his face like an aura. A smile emerges that is both sweet and ornery, mystical, saint-like. He is Whitman and Blake, Daniel Boone and his icon Robinson Jeffers all rolled into one.

You're 20 years old with working-class hands and you don't know what to make of him. His lectures aren't lectures, but "meditations," stream-of-consciousness journeys into the subjective regions of the mind. They are like Mass on acid. He probes right into your soul—into the soul of the cosmos.

"Vocare, vocare," he repeats time and again. "The calling. A call from the deep of the night in the inner soul. The inner being is opening its eye, trying to see. The inner nodes are birthing, flowering. Messages of supreme consequence, implicit urgency. The Threshold."

You cannot escape his power. He reads to you his first poem:

*Go away,
Follow the spoor of a wounded buck,
Over the marsh and deep into the desolate hills.
You must never sing those old songs here again.*

You read him your first poem. He gives you approbation. Approbation, from the Latin *approbare*, to approve. You covet his approval.

He turns you on to Muir, Snyder, Jeffers, Dharma Bums, Kesey, London, Joaquin Miller, Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces*—the Pacific Coast literary archetype. You realize that you have family, that you belong. A place to put your words.

You change your life in homage to his spirit. Whatever you write that is good, that is pure, is born of him.

Now that he is dead you remember his words:

"O the close, the close the beautiful close! You have to lose your life in order to save it. You have to expand yourself in order to find yourself. You gain your life only by giving it up."

O Bill, is there a bright light beyond the darkness? These words on the printed page are my good-bye.

Sources

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