

## Gilbert Sorrentino

### CATECHISM

*Is it true what they say about Dixie?*

In time and of the essence, river of tender adolescent tears, as whispered by the ghost, long wind-grieved and not yet laid, it may become true. When old Dixie shakes, when those good ol' boys stop walking down those hot red clay roads, or when lovers make no rendezvous 'neath the magnolias. Certainly, it is false to speak of honeysuckle, tobacco, grits, slaves, Confederates of stone far gazing, deserted rocking chairs on shady verandas in the heavy heat of August afternoons, and whatever other items from Dear Old Southland that come to mind. The argument seems to be that nothing whatever known to Yankee man is true of Dixie. From other voices we may hear the harshest truths, from baking cotton fields, from other rooms, down on the levee, in the Mississippi muck, O drawling ghosts! Crackers in the sleepy town square, raw-boned and still. Them mercury vapor streetlights leading to the highway!

*Who is Sylvia?*

Sylvia Sackett Besunder, white, female, 34, of 3025 West 2nd Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. Elementary-school teacher, beloved by all. Her construction-paper suns and pussycat silhouettes shine out and purr upon the streets of raw Canarsie down below.

*Is that the Chattanooga Choo-Choo?*

No. From its general construction and style, as well as its size, silhouette, and the insufferable noise it makes, it may be the Wabash Cannonball, the Redball Express, the Hondo Hurricane, the Laredo Limited, the Delaware Lackawanna and Western Delight, the Erie Smoke, the Santa Fe Savage, the Missouri-Pacific Blazer, the Texas-Pacific Tornado, the Union Pacific Paramount, the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Zippo, the Toonerville Trolley, the Zenith Hummingbird, the Western Pacific Wendigo, the Pennsylvania Phantom, the Long Island Stroller, or the Tuscaloosa Breeze.

*What do you do in the infantry?*

You die, you die, you die.

*Can Jack-an-Ape be merry, when his clog is at his heel?*

Marry, an' as the wise old king who plugged a dozen holes of an evening was wont to say, his encarnadined phiz covered o'er with the juice o' the sacred grape, a varlet'll come to his galliards an' his corantos late, if he come at all, for the wine goes round in his whirling eye that the faithful sun doth scorch to a desert consistency as like as to powder as m'lady's damask skin beneath her plackets when the reeling moon doth sport with her desperate suitors, the stars. An' why not then a thing so shaped in man's decided visage as the poor dumb fettered baboon? 'Tis not a clog that'll let a gay old dog, or, an't please you, the grinning fool, Jack Ape.

*Nov schmoz ka pop?*

Inter belfuscu idionie tae brezhnov da poz, pu ka poppa taemoz ka don aeroplane, peru tae kaloz; taen melozhnoz, p donzu donoz perlopki.

*Is fancy sick, or turned a sot, to catch at shadows which are not?*

Nay, 'tis the line that makes one puke on one's fedora or peruke.

*If God be with us, who can be against us?*

Strategic Air Command, New York Yankees, First Marine Division, Fuckin' A, Army of Northern Virginia, the Administration, Japanese Marines, Schutzstaffel, 82nd Airborne Division, Viet Cong, Zeros, Pittsburgh Pirates, Army of the Potomac, Adolf Hitler Division, Apaches, the times, Internal Revenue Service, Camp Pickett, diseased whores, Crazy Horse, Nelson Rockefeller, book reviewers, Stukas, 2nd Army, Peoples' Republic of China, KP pushers, the customs, bookmakers, Geheime Staatspolizei, CIA, platoon sergeants, the odds, Ford Hood, San Francisco Giants, narcotics dealers, the past, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the rich, the future, landlords, and the advertising business. Others on request.

*Where are the snows of yesteryear?*

Under the shadow, by the piers they waited.

*Who threw the overalls in Mrs. Murphy's chowder?*

Cornelius A. ("Connie") Ryan, late of Morristown, New Jersey, who dreamt drunkenly away the long and placid summer afternoons over many a tall and frosty Tom Collins in the cool, dim taproom of the Hi-Top. Blest be his lost and gentle youth.

*What is all this juice and all this joy?*

Tomato, V-8, apple, orange, grapefruit, clamato, cranberry, grape, cranapple, pear, plum, peach, clam, and love. The joy: all the rich, long-lasting suds you could possibly want—a dermatologist's treatment for your mitts. After the dishes, you might wish to silently ope hubby's trousers with your dovesoft digits. He'll beat his feet on the Mississippi mud, guaranteed.

*Will a duck swim?*

Aye, an't please his lord, the gibbous moon.

*How do you speak to an angel?*

In thus wise: Go, my dear Angel, I beg of thee, to where my Jesus lies; say to my Divine Redeemer that I adore Him and that I love Him with all my heart. Invite the adorable Prisoner of love to come into my heart and make it His fixed abode. My heart is too small to afford a lodging for so great a King, but I purpose to enlarge it by faith and love.

*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

Lupus in fabula, nomen et omen, rara avis.

*Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?*

Hardly. Yet the quality of the water often does vary widely from place to place; such variations, however, are often more apparent than real, and have to do with the drinker's emotional and psychological relationships *vis-à-vis* the locale in which the water is encountered. *Vide* J. R. Morton, who writes: "Michigan water tastes like cherry wine, Mississippi water tastes like turpentine."

*If winter comes, can spring be far behind?*

Spring will be a little late this year.

*What cannot Gold do?*

A number of things, the more prominent among which are: make the pivot, shoot the rapids, differential calculus, speak Spanish, hit in the clutch, carry a tune, get a job, say no, walk a crooked mile, swim, hold his liquor, support his children, write a poem, play tennis, pay his bills, trim his beard, shine his shoes, take a shower, use capital letters, keep his sex life private, be proud, speak to an angel, take a little walk, boil lobsters, open clams, like women, cut it out, grow up, move to Yonkers, cease and desist, jump over the candlestick, act his age, fly a kite, go two rounds, catch a fish, make a salad, write a check, wash the windows, eat crow, crack

corn, fly the coop, take a powder, go anywhere alone, bunt, write a play, stop the shit, cut the comedy, know Brooklyn, mind his business, sharpen his ax, make an apple pie, honor his father and his mother, be a Jew, shoot crap, make a list, see himself as others see him, play pool, be joyful and triumphant, take off his hat, wash a glass, deck the halls, mix a Sazerac, be a clown, sing in the rain, jump with Symphony Sid, make 'em laugh, stand a ghost of a chance, button up his overcoat, love a mystery, get started, and shudder.

*Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley?*

Elmer: Brooklyn, New York; Herman: White Plains, New York; Bert: Anaheim, California; Tom: Tampa, Florida; Charley: Flint, Michigan.

*If things did not break, or wear out, how would tradesmen live?*

Why, by sticking it up and snapping it off, in time-honored custom.

*Do the drummers in black hoods rumble anything out of their drums?*

They do. Among their renowned compositions are the following: *Tough Davy Daybreak, I Caught That Chick in a Web of Love, Krupageneous, Big Sid From the City, Will My Buddy Love Me (Now That He's Struck it Rich?), By a Cozy Coal Fire, I Heard the Voice of J. C. in the Desert, Marable's Miracle, Wily Wilson's Nothing But a Shadow, In the Old Morello Tower, The Life of Riley, Murray Likes 'Em Sunny Side Up, Tutti-Frutti-Zutti, Waiting in the Wood Yard of Your Heart, The Prophet Moffett, Ay! Qué Chanopozo!, G. I. Jo, Perpetual Motian, A Cool Rudy Collins, Jumpin' Joe Philly, Harold Went West, Stompin' at McKinley Junior High, Lamond's Wands, Don't Fool Fatool, Higgins Ink, I'll Stabulus His Fabulus (And Spend the Rest of My Life in Bed), High-Greer Cruisin', In Dear Old County Shaughnessy, Denzil's Best Bet, Lo Mein at Li Yung's, Let My Love be the Coalman in the Cellar of Your Heart, Tell it to Dougherty, Dam Ye!, Alvin-paradiddlestollerapalachicola, Bendixonia, The Night They Sank the Barrett Deems, Clarke Street Ramble, The Ballad of Tornado Jones, Poachin' Roaches, Our Kiss on Connie Cay, Wettling Your Whistle, The Black Art of Shaky Blakey, Doin' the Harewood Glide, Cowboy Thompson Et Up All the Chuck, Shake Hands With Brother Haynes, Taylor Made, Calling Dr. Donaldson, Osie Blues, Shoepolish Jones (Gave the Birds the Willies), Mardiganapolis, Saunders Pavilion Stomp, and Cowans' Can o' Corn.*

*What has four wheels and flies?*

A gay caballero carrying two bicycles. (Some say he floats.)

*Are the stars out tonight?*

They are. But before dawn some of them will have found places in various eyes, some settle on flags and banners, still others will take up residence in Hollywood and other film capitals of the world, many will be wished upon, one will be born, a handful will shimmer, gleam, shiver, glitter, twinkle, or shine, a few will either shoot or fall, dozens will cluster together, dozens more give off dust, one will be steadfast and constant, another lucky, some few have a stairway built to them, one serve as a cocktail ingredient, many will wander, one have a wagon hitched to it, another team with a garter, some form a crowd, scores remain chaste, most look down, and a group fall on Alabama.

*Who needs people?*

The Daredevils of the Red Circle.

*What's black and white and red all over?*

*My Sunday Missal*, Rev. Joseph F. Stedman, Director of the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, 5300 Fort Hamilton Parkway, Brooklyn, New York. *Nihil obstat*. James H. Griffiths, S.T.D., Censor Librorum. Imprimatur. ✠ Thomas E. Molloy, S.T.D., Bishop of Brooklyn. January 6, 1938. Scriptural Quotations from Revised Text of New Testament as copyrighted 1941 by Confraternity of the Precious Blood. Printed and Bound in the U.S.A.

*How's every little thing in Dixie?*

Cherry pink and apple blossom white.

*Why are these pipples taking their hets off?*

They are entering a church. It's very warm for June. Joe Namath is speaking in Ozone Park. The Phillies have won the pennant. God is just. Itchy foreheads. The flag is passing by. Pope Paul has arrived at second base. The daughter of Rosie O'Grady has appeared on Ovington Avenue. A rough beast has slouched toward Bethlehem to be born. The sudden summer shower has ended as quickly as it began. To fill them with yellow pencils. It's raining violets. They don't know no better. Ask a silly question. The winner has paid \$93.40. Love's magic spell is everywhere. They've decided to stay a while, after all. They got no respect. There'll be pennies from heaven. They have realized that Chicago is a big city. They don't want any trouble. To carry (lacking jars) moonbeams home in. To throw into Mrs. Murphy's chowder.

They're crazy with the heat. Eventually, why not now? In preparation for eating them. It's a damn fool thing to do. To feel the autumn breeze. To pay homage to our rugged leathernecks. For the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To look alive. They're a bunch of goddam idiots. Sunstroke is their delight. Sure, an' they be wantin' to show off their foine new haircuts. They're only human. Here comes a sailor. They've flipped their wigs. They've blown their tops. Should they then be ashamed of their pates? You never can tell, you never can tell. Exaggerated bows and much toadying to follow. Frank Capra made them do it. The golden final spike's been driven, hooray! The tycoon with great warm heart beneath has bailed the *Clarion* out, hoorah! Bart Kahane has regained his sight. They love loony beams. They never cared much for moonlit skies. The strains of the immortal anthem are heard far down the glittering boulevard. The new schoolmarm is alighting from the stage, silken ankle the cynosure of every eye. They should care. There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight. The sky is not falling. They have seen the light at the end of the tunnel and are glad. As preliminary to foot scuffling and toe digging. They've left their worries on the doorstep. Prince Stanislaus Poniatowski is bidding his family farewell. The "Potemkin" has dropped anchor in the harbor, rah! To throw them into the ring. They're gonna wash some man right outta their hair. Men as well as women have been liberated from the stultifying sexual roles that have for so long deprived them of the ability to function in a truly human way. Bird lives.

*Did we lie down, because 'twas night?*

We did not. We lay down on the orders of Inspector Hearstone of the Death Squad.

*Now what do you think of little Jack Jingle?*

He's an Eskimo Pie and a Mexican Hat, a Skippy Sundae and a three-cent chocolate. All heart and a mile wide, vicarious warrior and victor at the battle of White Oaks, where his grandfather fell, he gives not his friendship easily, is a storehouse of arcane lore and amusing anecdote, and has trouble fielding the short hop. Yet and yet, there was once a twinkle in those wise old eyes and a sentence in that rusty pen. Where, oh where have they gone? Lost somewhere in the harsh midtown air? Swept off a Riker's counter with the stains and crumbs of an early breakfast with crisp *Mirror*? Disappeared in the grime of Yiddish walls and Neapolitan linoleum? Drowned in the boozy camaraderie of the Lion League where they cannot hit the curve? Facing into the glare of constant incandescent lights, with a stoop and a tremble, a shuffle and cough, the magic letters of his azure cap have lost all power. Old and sad and cold.

*What made fatuous sunbeams toil to break earth's sleep at all?*

Twelve dollars a week in wage increases each year of a three-year contract, plus nine dollars in pension and welfare benefits for the first year and seven dollars for the second year.

*How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?*

$$\sqrt[3]{-\frac{1}{2}q + \sqrt{Q}} = \sqrt[3]{r \cos \theta + ir \sin \theta}$$

and 
$$= \sqrt[3]{r} \left\{ \cos \frac{1}{3} (\theta + 2k\pi) + i \sin \frac{1}{3} (\theta + 2k\pi) \right\}$$

$$\sqrt[3]{-\frac{1}{2}q - \sqrt{Q}}$$

$$= \sqrt[3]{r} \left\{ \cos \frac{1}{3} (\theta + 2k\pi) - i \sin \frac{1}{3} (\theta + 2k\pi) \right\}, \quad k = 0, \frac{1}{2}, \text{ or } 1 \text{ (cord)}$$

*Where have all the flowers gone?*

Pressed carefully yet luxuriantly represented in their dazzling numbers and diversity, among the vital leaves of the late Lorenzo, lady lover and body booster, not only lovingly and whimsically described with an almost overpowering intensity (not as they are but as the poet's piercing eye describes them), but set as complements to other natural wonders, i.e., trees, clouds, mountains, lakes, beaches, mossy banks and shady glens. Their subtle perfume appeals to women, proud as peacocks though they may be, in love.

*What are patterns for?*

Essay-type questions will not be accepted at this time by Christ!

*Ah, did you once see Shelley plain?*

Yes. Lieutenant Colonel Edmund K. Shelley, Infantry, Commanding, at a full field inspection held on a hot Saturday morning in August, 1951. The officer (not a West Pointer but possessing the same curiously determined yet vacuous mien of one) was approaching the pinnacle of hysterical military fury moments after discovering, on a hapless private's bunk, a bar of toilet soap, which, while in its proper position, was of a white color. The colonel's rage can be understood only if it is known that his orders to company commanders, orders that were dutifully passed along the chain of command, specified that only green toilet soap would be permitted to be displayed during the inspection, in this case the soap to be Palmolive. Colonel Shelley's face was red and the sweat on it

gleamed, a perfect complement to the gleam of his silver oak leaves. There is something about a soldier. One suspects that his beginning phrase, "What's this?" was clearly gratuitous, since it is clear that he knew what "this" was. The question was asked of the barracks at large, but elicited no reply.

*Who the devil will change a rabbit for a rat?*

Dr. M. Cranston-Lane, the renowned biochemist and prestidigitator.

*Why should a rich man steal?*

To butter his bread, clip his coupons, sail his yacht, race his horses, gild his lily, sing his song, ball his jack, flip his wig, dream his little dream, jam his blues, eat his fill, wish upon his star, drink his bitter cup, make his face, smile his smile, crack his whip, roll his hoop, dim his brights, blow his cool, shoot his load, tote his barge, carry his burden, arch his eyebrows, paint his wagon, button his lip, open his heart, fry his fish, cast his stone, steal his kiss, have his cake, kill his bottle, end his day, ink his roller, spill his gravy, abdicate his throne, move his bowels, lay his ghost, shovel his walk, speak his piece, put in his two cents, hang his hat, crush his ice, tune his radio, take his part, do his share, capture his imagination, defend his honor, bat his brains out, wet his whistle, cancel his order, pick his brains, swell his chest, keep his head, dunk his doughnut, show his flag, grate his cheese, twirl his cane, tie his tie, back his winner, draw to his straight, accent his good points, groove his pitch, bust his balls, rock his cradle, enjoy his leisure, let his hair down, defeat his opponent, lose his touch, whip his cream, hit his point, damn his eyes, walk his narrow line, feel his oats, haul his ass, evade his responsibility, slap his leather, grit his teeth, bend his admiring glance, hold his water, burn his bridges, fly his kite, reap his harvest, entertain his thought, smash his idol, hold his line, crush his desires, check his swing, rack his brains, search his soul, waste his time, laugh his head off, take his advantage, shoot his moon, pack his bags, drive his nail, cut his rug, run his tight ship, curse his blue streak, close his account, cudgel his brains, burn his midnight oil, beat his meat, pull his daisy, slam his door, drown his sorrows, honor his flag, keep holy his sabbath day, covet his neighbor's wife, crash his party, make his mark, emit his groan, have his heart, jump his gun, seize his opportunity, rue his day, roll his eyes, throw his left, push his jab, waste his substance, sink his basket, take his base, crack his books, bare his soul, eat his crow, smack his lips, pay his piper, swing his deal, pop his fingers, sink his putt, wipe his slate clean, ride his hobby horse, live his life.

*Who is the third who walks always beside you?*

The night of the first snow a polar bear lumbered between us!  
The snow was white against his whiteness! And your eyes were dark, ah! Winter wonderland, this stringent city!

*Whither shall the ox go where he shall not labor?*

Down in the dale, up in the glade, to the soft sylvan music of zephyrs through cool and shadowy leaves, where a kiss is still a kiss and coronals of bosky flowers, tender greens and great pearls await him; where all the sprites and satyrs, nymphs and fairies dance in dappled sunlight to the syrinx, pipe, and lute, thrum-thrum, where birds do sing, and lovers and their nut-brown lasses lie among the green corn fields, with a heigh! nonny-nonny-no, and over all the laughter wafts of the idle and besotted boy to whom the grape is sacred, jug!

*Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?*

I can see a steeple surrounded by people.

*What is this thing we call a kiss?*

French, tongue, soul, chaste, motherly, fatherly, brotherly, sisterly, ass, genital, Judas, trembling, rough, hesitant, sweet, soft, wet, dying, fevered, goodnight, farewell, burning, and chocolate.

*Who killed Cock Robin?*

The Brothers Torroncino, Sal, Rocco, and Gennaro, three gents of Italo-American heritage, dubbed by the press "the Mad Dog Killers." They sizzled in Sing-Sing.

*How many miles to Babylon?*

Approximately as many as from Yonkers to Ebbets Field. (Figure in light years.)

*Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?*

Jove, yass! Haw-haw-haw! Quite extraordinary! Ripping, I say, bloody super! Great Scott! Zonk! Ka-chow! Bonkers, wot? Cheer-o! A rum go but perishingly clever, eh wot? Deucedly fiendish! Krash! Oh, dear! Bam! Quite! Yass, guv'nor, a large pink gin, easy on the pink, eh wot? Haw-haw! Boom! Ka-chang! Elementary! Bit of all right for the little buggers, eh old chap? By Jove, the whole thing is simply smashing! Zzzip! Quite right, a splash of soda! Eh wot? Neat? Kippers? Pow! Not quite cricket, old man? Quite! Krrrunch! Oh, jolly good, jolly jolly good, haw! Blub!

Shall we bugger off? Frightfully decent of the chap to suggest it.  
Rather! Slam!

*What will become of the mice and the rats?*

Along with all the pussycats, they'll all be ground to sausage  
meat in Dunderbeck's machine.

*Can anyone explain the wonder of love?*

On a beautiful spring evening in 1932, Aphrodite appeared suddenly to three poor and simple fishermen who had just finished a long, disheartening, and luckless day in their small boat some three miles out from Sheepshead Bay. Subtly deshabelle in black silk stockings, grey patent leather heels, and a pearl choker, she settled herself comfortably in the stern of the humble craft, and spoke. "Boys," she said, "if any one of you can explain the wonder of love I will give him the pleasure of my company in a swell hotel for an entire night, box seats for each game of the World Series—in which a Mr. Ruth will perform a fantastic and hardly credible feat—and two tickets to next week's production of something, I forget what just now. Now, shoot!" The first fisherman, a hardy soul whose eyes were bigger than his birdie, spoke right up. "The wonder of love is being apprehended, naked and in an aroused state, in the shower stall of one's enamorata by her suddenly returning husband and replying to his query 'What are *you* doing here?' with the snappy 'Everybody's gotta be someplace.'" "Eighty-six," said the voluptuous goddess, whisperingly crossing her silk-encased gams. The second honest angler hesitantly opined "When the moon makes you feel like you just et scungill'?" "No, no, my good fellow," the glorious immortal gently laughed, for she was the soul of kindness and a good sport into the bargain. The third fisherman, a broth of a lad whose roots plunged deep into the soil of old County Mayo, said, with much embarrassment and furious blushes, for his eyes were fixed on Aphrodite's unbelievable built and were like to bust out his head, "The wonder of love is"—and here he broke wind—"catchin' that and puttin' it in a bottle." At this, the glorious lady gently grasped him by his crotch and together they flew, through the gathering Brooklyn blueness, in the general direction of the Hotel St. George.

*Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?*

Waiting on the levee, waiting for the "Robert E. Lee."

*Whose heart is aching for breaking each vow?*

The heart of First Lieutenant Evelyn Leonard, Women's Army Corps, HQ Co., Fort Lee, Virginia. Lt. Leonard, happily married

for four years to Captain Kurt Leonard, Infantry, presently on active duty in Germany, was surprised and embarrassed some two weeks ago when she was discovered early one morning in the shrubbery behind the WAC Officers' Quarters by a routine patrol of two Military Policemen. According to the MP report, Lt. Leonard's blouse was open and the rest of her uniform was "disheveled." She was also in a "compromising position" with a companion, described as a WAC corporal. Lt. Leonard appeared to be inebriated and replied to the MPs' initial questions with "laughter and filthy language." She is presently confined to quarters, and disciplinary action is pending.

*Why should we rise, because 'tis light?*

A place for everything, and everything in its place.

*How are things in Glocca Morra?*

Soft, soft, Jayzus, and it's the rain coming down as it does, general all over Ireland, the Emerald Isle, that fell from out of heaven at God's merest whisper, for God is an Irishman, ah, the land of Saint Patrick and the little green snakes and many a foine policeman's ancestors, all, all of them Irish kings, don't you know, and the memory of the mists and dews and bogs and meandering rivers brings a tear to the eye in the New World, even now, of those who cannot possibly know anything of the magic of it except through the blarney of such as Uncle Mark and Cousin Pat and Aunt Mattie, it's indeed a soft day, accent on the "f" if you follow my meaning, and begod and bedad if you don't like the weather you can take your great bone of a frame and use it for what the Good Lord intended, and disgusting it is, that is, to haul yer arse to hell and gone away from this chosen Eden, now so luxuriant, as when is it not? with various vegetation and low-lying mists and spotted here and there, as a matter of fact, wherever you look, with foine big strapping lads and their blushing colleens and here and there the sweet-smelling Irish cows, begod, with the milk out of them enough to make yer eyes fall out with the joy of the taste of it, and what these young people do be up to in the bushes and holly and gorse and weeds or whatever the Christ (may He forgive me) it all is is nobody's business except that you can be sure that they'll be speaking up on a Saturday and telling of it if it be what is called a mortal sin or even a venial one, to that good shepherd who is in charge of this poor flock of fleshly sinners, I mean, of course, Father Danny O'Driscoll, by God and I remember him when he was the most punishing footballer hereabouts, oh yes indeed, many a back be broke on a Sunday afternoon, faith, he's a remarkable man, the type we call here a black Irishman, may

God forgive me if I lie, and He is my judge, he is certainly the strongest man in the county, and handsome and strapping as well, with always a jest and a smile, though he's got a tooth knocked out in the front where a cow kicked him one day when he crept up behind her because she didn't recognize him in his Dublin clothes, all plaids and flowers and the like, and a man he is, whatever they may say of him, the old women hereabouts who have nothing but vile stories for the stranger's ear, full of understanding he is concerning the weaknesses of the flesh, a prince, a king, and if he takes a bit of the malt now and then it's to help him relax and take the damned chill off his bones, by God, only a busybody would begrudge him his taste of the craytur, am I not right? Anyway, things here are wonderful. Right as rain.

*What is this thing called love?*

Who dares to speak of love or even question its hidden essences when we are surrounded by what many call, if you will pardon the vulgarism, "harsh reality" and its ugly and sordid concomitants? Love alters not at all when it is confronted by other alterations, nor does it bend or vacillate with benders or vacillators. Some think of it as the Northern Star, constant and faithful, totally unlike those excitable orbs of flame that decide, now and again, to rush, pell mell, to the earth, falling, for some reason, on Alabama, more often than not. It cannot be fathomed even though it is a simple thing: a golden ring on a delicate hand, a glittering dime (thin) held gracefully by two finders in lustrous black kid, it's funny. It's sad. But, unfailingly, it is thought to be beautiful. One may ask the Lord in heaven above about it but He will not deign to answer the question. Except—except through the agency of certain texts, the purport of which seems to be that God Himself is love. Some, however, must think of it as a baseball game on television, glaring lights surrounding, a glass of organic apple juice by the elbow, or on the elbow (or the elbow in the glass). There are misguided souls who find its quintessence in the sight of a large bowl of limp lettuce leaves, floating in seas of olive oil, in which has been crumbled blue cheese; perhaps the gallant fight of the lettuce to assert some of its native flavor symbolizes, for them, the gallantry, the "never-say-die" attitude of sweet Eros. This is what some call a roobric. It is not that the lettuce wins or loses, but that it plays the game, is it not so? Grandma Rice has said this is a lost text entitled, *De Animae Saladae*. And why not? Is it Leo? Libra? Moneyloving Taurus? Sneaky Capricorn? Gentlefolk have found its *quidditas* in the blue crackling of teeny orgones heading merrily and unerringly through the atmosphere toward the (may

we be so bold?) genital region. Shall we then laugh at these box-sitters? Is it not possible that they have the secret Word? Why must we snicker and titter, in the “modern” way that we have, at these seekers after truth? Did not the great H. D. Thoreau himself say, “I think that I shall never squeeze a girl as lovely as these trees”? Was he fooling us? There are grave doubts. If its magic spell is everywhere, why do we not then (or do we?) see it, *or* its magic spell? Answer that question and you have given the whale his thumb. Or the monkey? A dog knows of love: observe him. Is it, can it be then, like God Himself (Itself)? I speak, of course, of that inscrutable God who sees in the tidal wave or tornado that destroys the sleeping Okie town the same Beauty that resides in a mother’s smile. What of Frau Himmler? There was love in that smile she bent on little Heinrich, “Google Eyes” as he was called in Unschleinchstraasei. Is it a hoodoo that follows one about? Dunno. A pounding in the heart, the small coronary occlusion that gently warns one of the old “dust to dust” routine? Perhaps. It may be the image of a simple and rawboned rube beneath an apple tree in bloom. Call it, then, love in bloom. Some hotblooded rogues maintain that it is nothing more than the sight of a well-endowed young woman in nothing but tiny lace bikinis. Yet what of homosexual gents? They must be served. There are gardens in their faces, too. And if God is love is God then the lass in lacy undies? Or what? Is love, then, the luscious lass? What would Thoreau really have done if into the silence of Walden Pond a willowy gentlewoman had intruded, clad only in these same scanties? Kicked his favorite elm? Rushed toward her, muskrats all forgotten? Perhaps the sun would shine down, as is his want as well as his wont, and smile his sunny smile, for some say that the sun itself is love. There are certain ribald ethnics who maintain that when the moon hits the eye like a big pizza pie—that is love. But can the moon be justly compared with a pizza pie? Lao-Tzu has said: “Quietness is Master of the Weed.” What then? In any event, one may go so far as to say that it is, like Caesar’s wife, sweeping the country.

*Must business thee from hence remove?*

Affirmative. (And high time.)