

ON GIANTS

Runes and Tunes

An essay in words and music on giants and other big ideas.

By
Richard L. Rose

Script for the recording

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This aversion to any such innovation amounts to a shrinking from an essentially alien scheme of life.

—Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (p.139)

One of the writers of the book of *Genesis* says that there were “giants in those days” long ago when humanity was young. Those alien “Mighty ones” came not from space but from unions between “sons of God” and daughters of men. The Nephitim, mentioned were reported by Israel’s scouts in the land of the Amalekites, to be too strong and “great in stature” to be defeated by such “grasshoppers” as the tribes of Israel. This report sent the whole congregation back into the wilderness for another forty years. Unlike Ole Rolvaag’s giants in the earth, the mighty ones of the past deserved no nostalgic commemorations.

We are typically frightened or overcome by the prospect of huge, mighty structures like Goliath, the *Wehrmacht*, or Massa. The giants of old certainly lived before psychology had reduced them to figments of the imaginations of children in a world of huge adults; before scholars like D’Arcy-Thompson, arguing on surface versus volume, demonstrated that they don’t exist, and before a new religion, arriving in tenth century Scandinavia, called for their burial or domestication.

Giants are routinely ridiculed, cheated, or heroically defeated. They’re rarely sympathetic figures. Goliath succumbs to a slingshot wound. The titan brothers are tricked out of their magic helmet and ring. The Cyclops, like a multinational conglomerate with a singular vision or like Jack’s *FeeFiFoFum*, enjoys nothing more than grinding bread or profit from human flesh. But also like most giants, he is blinded by his single-mindedness.

A story in which giants uncharacteristically got the upper hand was told about the Norse thundergod’s visit to the land of giants:

Utgard

Now Thor, mighty of the Aesir
treads in the imprint of a Giant's heel.
Now Donar-thor of thunder-lightning
is silent, with his hand-grip tightening
on the shortened haft of Miölnir.
His restless fingers press his belt of steel.

His fiery eyes are downcast darkened,
as he follows, apace of Skrymir,
Frost Giant, son of Rime. From Utgard
silently along the hill and westward
brushing through dark-hid pines they wind.

They said, "Come, Toddler Thor, drink deeper."

In thought he overturns the line.

"Eastward to the other land,
I, hewer in sunder of the nine heads of Thrivaldi;
I, Vingnir, the Hurler, the Noisy One, Hlorr'thi,
the slayer of Geirrod: my design
and wont were just: to slay ill working giants."

In Utgard hall the common horn
was brought to Thor, Great Drinker, mighty one
of gods:

"One draught to drain, small one,
as we do, thirsty son of Jord."

He tried to drain it, had his fill.
The horn was full when he was done.

Guffaws and jeers from maws of giants
rose around the board, mountains laughing:

"Hah! Is this great Thor?"

The knot-scar near his eye burned sore—

sharp whetstone-flek flung in defiance
by a dying foe.

“The cat!” they roared.
“Lift if you can that curled, sleek she-cat
with sea-gray coat and eyes gall-green.”
His hands around the quiet chest
pressed and pulled but barely wrest
one trembling paw; while so unmoved,
the creature yawned.

“A cat more lean
would better suit the little god,
the Wide-Wanderer.”

His forehead burned.
“I am the Sire of Might, who lifted
high the hulk of Hrungrir, shifted
that great carcass when it bore
down on my chest.”

“Those praises were unearned.
for Hrungrir turned himself in dreams.
But these tasks were too small for mighty Thor.
Your boasts were three: of drink, of might,
and warfare strength. Fight in our sight.
Great though your power to small ones seems,
all word-wind boast is your man-treasured lore.”

Then Elli, toothless, bowed gray crone
with dully shining, dark and sunken eyes,
alone, wrapped in black winding, wheezing,
shuffled through the hall.

“Now, spring!”
they cried. “Lock with her, bone to bone,
you mighty giant-killer of the skies!”

Her stagnant breath from twenty paces off
enshrouded, stalled, and stilled him.
Her hands squeezed his leaden arms,
frozen to his sides. He sank; fell back,
rose on one knee, and was released.

“What? So soon fallen, mighty Thor?
Midgard’s Warder, protector of right?”

Rumbling like a summer storm

That grips the clouds and fills the fjords
And twists the sky and slashes bright
Scars across the plots of men,
He said, "I am a god of little might."

In failure, he, self-questioning, wondered,
Treading the footprints of the giants' king.
"Am I not, then, Asgard's lord,
not Friend of Man, the ploughman's Sword,
neither he who gives just word,
who ever sits at Council of the Thing?"

The giants in Utgard's horned feast-hall
watch silent moving shadows on the hills,
where king and god now stand alone:
and winds rise, and the larches moan.

"Hear, Thor. You are a warrior tall.
Your power cowering souls bestills.
The secret now, Utgard behind us,
because we feared your wrath below.
First, understand: The mead you drank,
it was the sea. Three ells it sank
around the Earth."

The breeze cut chill.

"The cat whose paw you wrested free
was the Midgard serpent, bright coiled
Earth's-band beneath the sea.

"The ancient crone you matched, withstood,
and even rose beneath
caves all of us to bones,
for she is Death, whom men and giants flee.

"The city's warm red feasting-fires—
look; see. The shivering aspens, pines,
high-beamed halls, are eye-illusions all,
shadows unforming at our call,
for we had heard he never tires
who Power and Justice is, and works
great signs among the sons of men.
What heard, sad-bound were we to know?"

The murder-thirsty Might-hammer

within Thor's hands begins to stir.
Whirling winds he breathes and plunges
fire-bolts at the giant melting like snow.

The lifted hammer unready slips down.
Rain and forehead-pain now blur his sight.
Rain streams like wine down his red beard.

“Where is the giant king I neared
To work my might? Into his town
I'll go. Those foes shall test my might.”

He turns to descend the hill
But all around is gravel plain
where raindrops fall few alone.

“Illusions?
Do I not boast aright? Delusions
By a foe? With what spoils
Do I cross the rainbow bridge again?”

June, 1965 (revised August, 2011)

Thor in Joutenheim tells about giants who excel at putting us into a dream-state so that we will believe they are invincible—even too big to fail. Of course, as previously mentioned, the new religion insisted that both giants and gods either behave or be gone. Augustine, first bishop of Britain, as the Venerable Bede recounts, corresponded with the Pope about retaining parts of the old cult for use by the church. Uneasily refashioned into liturgy, the ancient gods, celebrations, and customs were reinterpreted and stories told about new kinds of saintly heroes. Nordic warriors were given examples like Njal, who burned alive in his home rather than deny the new religion.

Such bleeding hearts have never yet been popular with giants and many others, but accommodations were made as missionaries spread and bishoprics were established, not so much because of the soul being like a sparrow that flits through the mess hall as because giants always have an eye for the main chance, even though they are too thick-headed to understand where lifting their hearts to another god may lead.

Sursam corda

“**H**eave up your hearts!” The chieftain-priest
sings on the moon-patched burial mound.
A hundred carles are warclad met
and crowded in the mossy glade.
Same shouts lifted their war-roar
sing *Habemus ad Dominum*.

Frost-deep, one buried there upright,
a heavy broadsword on his lap,
breathing left to other chests,
his black hands fast to helm and bill,
lips uncracked in slughorn, cry, or prayer,
burns slowly, far from sea.
Et in personis proprietatis.

Great his fame, avenging Svein
on twenty men with singing bill,
he swept among us as we fought,
flayed, and flensed the heathen,
winning vengeance, fame, bright spoils,
and our good fortune, spirit-met.
This christsblood mingles victory.

As Hallfred Ottarsson, court poet, or *skald*, to King/Saint Olaf Tryggvason,
observed,

***Time was I worshipped him who,
Well-skilled governs Hlidskialf:
Shocking shift, lo! In the
Shape of things we worship.***

L.M. Hollander, *The Skalds* (1947)

By the time of Oscar Wilde, giants had become reclusive codgers, retiring from
prodigious industrial endeavors to become huge consumers who displayed their wealth in
dandy attire and high-walled country estates, withdrew for brandy and cigars with friends
whenever possible, but, like Scrooges, still required redemption.

The Selfish Giant

A paraphrase of the story by Oscar Wilde set to music

In Wilde's story, a giant comes home from a long visit with a distant ogre to find children playing in his garden. He chases them off, posts no trespassing signs and puts a wall around it. The following Spring, nothing grows in his garden. In fact, snow and ice remain on the ground until one morning when he wakes to beautiful music and a fresh, fragrant breeze. He looks out and sees that some children have slipped into a corner of the garden; where they are playing, the snow has melted and the flowers and fruit trees have bloomed. When he goes into the garden, all of the children run away except for one small boy. The giant gently puts him onto the branch of a tree. The boy hugs him. The giant knocks down the wall and lets the children come. The boy who hugged him does not come, however, until shortly before the giant's death, when he reveals himself one winter in the white blossoms of a tree that has miraculously flowered, like the holy rood. The boy shows his stigmata and takes the giant with him to Paradise.

The music: The Selfish Giant Ballet Score

1. **Overture.**
2. **The garden.** Its trees were always bearing flowers and fruit while the children played in them.
3. **The giant's return:** the children are playing in the garden. The giant drives them out and puts up the sign, "Trespassers will be prosecuted," and surrounds it with a wall.
4. **Winter in the garden.** The trees in the walled garden cease to bloom. Frost, Snow, and Wind come to live in the garden. Wind whirls through the bare branches. The giant becomes sick with sorrow about the state of his garden. One day, he hears a bird, looks out the window, and sees the trees green and blossoming. Some children sneaked into the garden through a break in the wall. He goes down to greet them. They run in fear, except for one, who is hurt and caught in a tree. The giant sets him down, and the boy runs off.
5. **The giant removes the wall,** welcomes all to his garden, even though he is now quite sick. His illness becomes worse. The small boy returns to lift the giant into eternity.

Yet, despite this story of a redeemed giant, we still think about giants as obstacles to overcome and, like Odysseus, seize on any trick or invention that will turn the tables on them.

The Giants of Einhorn

A song

Around the ease of Arno town
the mustard fields were golden bright.
The chestnut trees bent to the ground
and all the grain was ripe.

When Thorstein's combs were stripped and peeled,
He looked up and was first to see
A far-off shape that jumped and kneeled
And ran as if to flee.

In time the shape became a man
Of drooping jaw and glittering eye
And when he made himself to stand
No more than four feet high.

*"And who are you, my dwarfish sir?
Now tell me, who is it you flee?
What wrong have done, or what command
Have broken carelessly?"*

"My name is Umrör and I served
The restless giants of cold Einhorn,
Giving more than they deserved
Until I was outworn.

"I warn you that a trampling crowd
Will come to take all they can see,
Discarding those who speak aloud
What others would let be.

"But witness how I warn you now:
Take in your wives, your stock and stores.
Close windows. Run. And leave your plow.
And shutter up your doors.

"Before the giants of cold Einhorn
Pour over fields and farms, and grind

Your peaceful lives, leave chaff and thorn.
Go now, or drop from mind.”

Around the ease of Arno town
the mustard fields were golden bright.
The chestnut trees bent to the ground
and all the grain was ripe.

The dwarf ran on and disappeared.
As Thorstein calmed his bees with smoke
And covered hives, the giants neared.
The biggest of them spoke.

“What you have is ours for taking.
Resist and you become a stew.
Comply. You’ll only get a shaking.
The choice is up to you.”

*“Thank you for the choice you give me.
Readily I would comply,
But him we serve in this fair valley
Strikes any who defy.”*

The giant lifted up his spear
And gently flung it past the moon.
“Who is this master we should fear?
We’ll eat him with a spoon.”

*“His armies,” Thorstein said, “are fierce.
And numberless the deadly quills
They launch to poison, maim, and pierce
Any their master wills.*

*“Even if you ate this case—“
He laid his hand upon the hive.
“Small as it is, his darts would race
To burn your guts alive.”*

The hive a thimble in his hand,
the giant said, “So what’s his name?
This master is a ruse you’ve planned.
He comes, or you’re to blame.”

• • • • •

“His name,” said Umrur, ages past,
was Honest Work, the giants’ bane.
The taste of honey didn’t last
but ever-fresh the pain.

“So truth and rumor, served up small,
and swallowed with the story told
pierce the proud and fell the tall,
who drop beneath the mossy mold.

“Welling from his nose and ears
like clotted smoke, the insects stream.
Welts close his eyes and dam his tears,
his throat too full for scream.”

Around the ease of Arno town
the mustard fields were golden bright.
The chestnut trees bent to the ground
and all the grain was ripe.

1970, Revised in 1973, 1982, and 2011

Giants and other big ideas are not the Great Ideas of Mortimer Adler. They are not supreme achievements of Western Civilization. In our time, they are uneasy notions of the unknown—the sheer vastness of it. Uneasy with the scale of our world-wide efforts, our restless entrapment of Earth in malls, industrial parks, battlefields, mountainous litter, and the pustulant plastic ooze of our culture into seas and air that erupts in jettisoned relics beyond the troposphere. The size and spread of *all of us* escapes our attention. Uneasy with the silences where the clink of submarines and the scrambling of crews living in metal hulls to ping the devils they know replaces the glutinously slow vibrato of whales; we fill our ears with the roar of handheld mechanisms that replace the brief skirmishes of white-spotted mocking birds outdoing each other for perches in the sycamore. Our giant Archaic Adult Body, of which we are all tissues and organs, follows its dark *hamingia*—its fate, its doom—as mindlessly as if in a trance. This is our native endowment, our *gypta*, that guides us like Adam Smith’s unseen hand. Call it the dreadful power of luck. Even when a powerful piece of luck falls into our hands, like a bag of beans, we are uneasy.

JACK AND THE BEINGS TALK

I's not what you think. The beans were more like avocado pits and the climb up more like googling. What made me dizzy were the interruptions to take calls and then having to look back to find my place. I nearly lost hold more than once but I knew Ma was calling to see if I'd gotten value for the dollar this time. Was she surprised when I came down with a nest egg-a-day policy. No strings. All from a little seed money. Anyway, I went on, as the voices said. Nobody cared about me talking to myself because no one was listening. People had buds in their ears. Everyone talked to themselves. Nobody noticed me talking to the beings. Somehow going up there had cleared out my ears the way when you blow your nose for a moment your ears are like part of a big pipe open at both ends that was always there but somehow you never noticed until something went to zero in your head. You were *re-set* the way the guy who sold me the beans re-set his balance on zero to show me he was giving me a full 100 ounces. I asked him what the little sliding weight was. He called it a tare and said everybody uses them. I guess they do.

Anyway, it's like my ears were re-balanced, set to zero, you know, without the tare. And I could hear the beings talking. Sometimes they were talking to me but mostly to each other. I never see them, maybe because my eyes are not zeroed. Probably that was good, because hearing the beings distracts me, and seeing them would really tie me up. You've got to know that I didn't ask for this.

Or maybe I did—by buying the beans. But I don't mind it. In fact, hearing what they have to say has given me some ideas, like when I went to see my friend Troy to tell him how well my start-up turned out. Troy was being someone else when I got to his walk-up. You don't like to interrupt, so I just sat in the kitchen and looked at the apartment across the street. A guy was coming out the front door. He carried a black briefcase. Probably it was a lap top he would open up on the subway on the way to work.

One of the beings said that's what he was going to do but the lap top was stolen. He was planning to visit some of the people in the data-base. This was how he spent his days. He picked a neighborhood, claimed to be an independent auditor checking files. He smiled broadly and asked the customer to take a moment validating the information on file, if she didn't mind. He usually picked forgetful women in their eighties.. It wouldn't

take long, he said very politely. This got him inside. I could see why he was happy with himself at the bus stop.

Then Troy took off his goggles and stopped being someone else. We had grilled cheese sandwiches and took a walk down by the river. I didn't tell him about the beings talking. I had told Ma, but she was too excited about her dividends rolling out of my turn-around profits. That's when I decided that it's probably better not to mention the beings. Every now and then, however, they would remind me that the deal was a joint venture. That worried me because my part in it right from the beginning had seemed pretty vague.

It wasn't just their talking that I heard. It was something like one time when Troy and I were under the bleachers when the crowd began the wave. You know, sixty thousand people standing and sitting down together made the eye beams flex and whine. We got out of there. I mean, we knew nothing was going to happen, but the idea of being under something that big when it wheeled around and flexed its muscles—well, that's the sound in the background when the beings talk. It's worried me sometimes.

So, anyway, one day I was going down to the dock where Troy and I hang out sometimes to watch the cranes swing booms over the water. I unwrapped a sub and sat on a pylon. This guy with a blue vest comes up and says I can't eat there.

One of the beings says he's not who he seems. He wants me out of the way because his buddies are robbing a warehouse. I looked around and, sure enough, there were some guys loading crates onto a flatbed. I strolled away as casually as possible, but then one of the beings said, "This is a joint venture. You must hold up your end."

I didn't have to tell them that I was not going to commit any crimes, deal or no deal. They knew. By listening through that pipeline, I guess. They said that all I had to do was say something to one of the guys loading the flatbed. He was big and sandy-headed, with forearms like two by fours, and orange nose-hair. I didn't want to talk to him. The beings flexed their giant, shrieking muscles, so I tapped the guy on the shoulder.

Before he had a chance to slit my throat, I said, "Jeff, they need you back in Brisbane. Now, Jeff."

He looked like he'd choked on a lug nut. Didn't ask me anything. He just ran off. I didn't hang around. When I got down to the fish market, I looked back. The Harbor police had stopped the truck. The beings said something like "Good save." It got me

thinking where I had found them.

See, it wasn't exactly like googling. It was more like trying to hold onto a thought while you're spinning around it. I don't mean spinning out like Troy does all the time. I mean, I had this thought, and it took off. I stayed on it no matter where it went. Ma was always telling me to get full value on the dollar. I couldn't go back to her with another wad of nothing. So I held on to this scaly thing, finny and spiked, flying through the air, or a brown stickiness that passed for air. It didn't dive the usual way. Leaping down was dropping in size, like cream swirling into coffee. Leaping up was sudden growth. You swelled until you were inside-out and branched in a thousand directions. But as I held on got its shape, searched it, and found how to climb in and out of it.

I could hear Ma shouting somewhere below. All the time it was twisting and wiggling and turning its heads around to snap at me, riding on its back. And, my cell was ringing. I finally turned it off. Sometimes we were in water, sometimes in an icy stillness and unbearable brightness. Closing your eyes didn't keep out the brightness. But there was a shape to the thing, and a path that it followed. When they knew I understood this, the beings started talking about our joint venture.

Later, I remembered the vague word they had used: a venture of *reclamation*. I hoped that my good save of the hairy bozo would satisfy them. They answered right away that there was more.. Ma didn't know how much value I was getting for her dollar. It made me wonder if the beings had hidden a tare on the balance before saying what I owed.

You figure you can go into another realm, take off what you can carry, and then be out of there. It doesn't work that way. The other realm has rules. Sure, you can make a raid. You can even escape. But the rules remain. You made a transaction. Things have to be zeroed up. It turns out that what matters in one realm is of no value in another. But the rules matter, even if you don't understand them..

So the beings would let me know when they were good and ready to be finished with our joint venture. Things were going great, of course. Ma was happy and I was fixed up. Everything perfect, you know. But it got me thinking about Eden. I mean, suppose someone were to find the way back. Then you'd have the rules to deal with. And, in a way, Eden was a tyrant's idea of heaven. Everything set up just right, you know, as long

as you follow the leader and a few rules—another joint venture. I guess you can tell that I was feeling trapped. I couldn't turn them off. They were there, somewhere in the pipeline, always talking to each other and making those metallic shrieks that reminded me of the Bay Bridge rearing up from the water like a giant centipede. I suppose most people would say that they were in my head. That's true. The problem was that part of my head was not where it should be. You know, I thought of getting medication, but I felt less afraid of hearing the beings talk than of being too bombed out to understand them. So I asked them what to do next. They said, "Look for Milo.Mihalakis". Then they made sure I would find him.

"Milo," I said to him. "It's not as if you can't go anytime you want. You hear what I'm saying?" He just gives me the big dumb stare the way he does. Find a way to get through that, I'm telling you, I'll give you a prize.. You just can't penetrate. And there was no use telling him I was not who he thought I was, because, of course, I was exactly who he thought. The beings had seen to that.

Find a way to get through that dumb stare if you're good at passing through walls.

So he's stretched out with one leg over the side of the bed and I'm lying against the wall with my head cracked. I didn't touch it to see if I was bleeding because I figured, I move again, it sets him off. You know? And Milo, well, it wouldn't take much. Like the guy must be three hundred pounds. He threw me into the wall like tossing a hat onto a hook at the barber's. So I didn't move. Maybe I couldn't move. It took some thinking.

I asked him, "If it was just you and me, how much would it matter?"

"What?" he says, with that same stare, like I was something he'd pulled from the grease trap.

"Yeah, just me and you. Sharing doesn't have to come into it. Forget this place. Forget what was said. Just you and me," I said. Truth was, I was dizzy, but passing out was not going to help me, you know, if I wanted to wake up.

He said, "You mean you take it back?"

That far I didn't want to go, so I said to him, "You remember when we were on the islands?" Now, I didn't know where I was going with this, but I had his attention, and sometimes you've got to just tell the story and hope you live to see the credits. "Yeah," I

said. “You had some of your best thoughts on the islands.” Then I said this, without saying that most of his thoughts were ankle deep, “Sure, just me and you on the islands.”

He frowns a little, you know. Like, do I squash her now or later? I’m pretty sure something was leaking down my back. How I am Milo’s girlfriend or where his real girlfriend went, if she went anywhere, or whether the beings had simply arranged for Milo to imagine I was his girlfriend, I don’t know. Anyway, I didn’t move.

“You remember how you liked the water?” I said. I like the water too. It was better than cracking heads—particularly my head. “You said the sand coming and going was like an equation.”

Milo said, “Like an answer, if only I knew the question.”

“Sure,” I say. “That’s it. You liked the water. We traveled a lot.” I didn’t mention that he’d put on weight since then and taken to cracking me against walls. Don’t set him off again, you know. Probably mentioning the sand was a bad idea. He didn’t need to be thinking about the chance that a breaker smashing a dune would carry off a grain from the middle—or some other bet which would cost me another body part. Those kinds of bets that had rattled me until I felt like a very loose string of beads. We got back onto the water.

“Yeah, the blue, the cobalt-blue sea,” he said.

“And the salty air, and the fire on shore near Ephesus where we ate callimari and watched the sky bleed into a bruise. You said the sun was still there, like a coin in a bowl you don’t see from the rim until someone pours water into the bowl. You remember that?”

“Yeah,” he says. For once, his eyes were not on me. I felt the back of my head. It wasn’t just the sun bleeding into a bruise.

“Just the two of us. We had it all. We traveled far since then, but you were right about the water, huh?”

He went back to staring. I tell you, a stare like that you don’t forget after being smashed up a few hundred times.

“Think about that water,” I said. “What did you call it? Cobalt blue?” I heard somewhere that an octopus will take up residence in anything from a precious amphora to a coffee can. We all have to protect our hides. All I had was a story without an ending. “I mean, the stuff boils and freezes. Squeeze and cool it some more, it’s a liquid again. Stop

the North Atlantic current, and you cloak the Earth in ice. Each realm has its own rules. Just like when we were traveling. Different states, different rules. Remember them looking at your Greek passport in Montana?”

Milo stared at his big feet, his black hair in his eyes. He held his hairy, right fist in his left hand and ground his teeth. He sat on the side of the bed. How much more time I had was anybody’s guess. I stuck with the water idea.

“Just you and me on the water. OK? Who knows what’s under the surface? Who cares? No white tops. Not even a riffle. Just like a film of polyurethane on a bar counter in Key West. Like you could step out of the boat and walk from Samos to Lesbos—or from Samoa to Los Angeles. It’s that firm. Yet you can also dip up a drink. Your rules. Water was your idea. It’s still good.”

Milo did not look up. He hung his head and slowly twisted his right fist like a pestle in the mortar of his left palm. Not good. Milo always had trust issues. Greeks and Turks or anybody else, for sure, should stay on their own sides of any island, if you ask me.

“OK, what about this?” I said. “There are no re-entries—not at the Cape, not anywhere. Not anytime. I know that. I respect that we can’t go back. Maybe you don’t see the point of imagining it’s just you, me and the bright, blue sea.”

He looked up. The rhyme helped, but it wouldn’t break his depression, and even Milo having a head cold would leave me with a week-long migraine. So his depression would put me in ICU if I soon didn’t get to the point. Or points. Or chunks, maybe.

“So, Milo. Imagine this.” I figured giving him a different picture would give me a chance to grow a new head. “We’re out on the water in our skiff. Becalmed. Maybe in the Tyrrhenian off Palermo, or maybe over a milky reef near Yucatan. It doesn’t matter. Just the two of us, the boat, blue sky and glittering sea. To your pals in the space station, we look like another chunk of light in a vast mosaic. Over the bow, you look at the water and see the same thing—the tessellation so far away only the glitter reminds you that it’s chunky and not smooth. I can’t take it back. It’s the way it is—just as you said. You were right about the water. If one of those tiny chunks you imagine seeing from the bow is another skiff on another becalmed sea, you could look over the side of that skiff and see some other apparition. Different states, different rules. That’s all I’m saying. We don’t

have to hang around here banging our heads into the wall. You could even stand to lose some weight. Let's move on. I'll stick with you."

It wasn't good to put the idea of banging a head back into Milo's mind, but I could tell he had spent his urge to slap me around. He reclined on the bed and studied the crummy ceiling. He had the picture. I could relax. Of course, the attraction of abuse is the surprises.

Two hours later, we were looking back at the motel as we pulled offshore. Going off on a freighter was Milo's idea. I hoped that throwing me overboard was not part of it.

"Good save," said one of the beings.

I was watching a freighter pull off as I sat on a pylon finishing my sub. I walked down to the beach to get a closer look. A big, bearded guy was staring back at the shoreline. He was alone with his thoughts, but his thoughts were taking another beating. I wondered if he heard voices. The tide swept in to make its additions and deductions. I wondered whether to tell Troy you didn't need goggles to be someone else.

Another of the beings said, "We'll let it stand."

Then all I heard was the hissing tide and high shrieks of the black-capped gulls.

*F*or all our uneasiness about them, we sense that giants want justice—not the equivocating, rickety wobble of a legal system, but the firm stroke of a battle wager. Their certainty and force amount to the same thing:

"Thrice armed is he who knows his quarrel just."

After Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899)

We may admire such justice, but we don't want to be on the receiving end. The inexorable working-out of our propensities and decisions seems unacceptable to our gentle and intelligent disposition. Reading the runes in the Pacific gyres or finding the loose strands of the Norns' knitting in the data on climate change are not ways to bring progress, "**moving forward**," as we say.

Moving Forward

Out of the safehouse where they had been hiding
months, with their Target a spot on a screen
washing his socks, or sneezing, or riding
his personal golfcart from clubhouse to green,
thoroughly satisfied terror abiding
kept well in check any untoward scene.

While his fungible assets were growing
espaliered on barbed wire, the Target
was watched like a bug on a screen
as he ordered a take-out or take-down,
sent his socks to be pressed,
told his favorite story
of humble beginnings
and subsequent glory,
the terror abiding an exquisite instrument
perfectly suited to keep bedsheets clean.

Out of the safehouse where they had been hiding
months eating rations, watching the Target
strip faces of feeling, riding from green to green;
watching his watchers and tasters,
listening for sing-song
where there should be deference,
propping of faces, no one confiding,
they planned him an escort past all appealing.

Perhaps Jack was not so much a giant killer as a sensitive fellow, maybe a philosopher like Thales, who puzzled over the huge but elusive influence of great forces strangely both impersonal and intimate. We get the vague, rumbling messages, the occasional shake as the Earth shudders; but having apparently little choice in the matter, we .continue driving from green to green.

The End



. . . sharing all lines and the quilted cover
of the Earth, now surveyed,
waiting to be remade.

—FRAMESHIFTS (vol.2, p.376)
(Quilt design by Mary Hobson)

AFTERWORD

Annunciations surround us. Attention to them reveals patterns in the world around us and inside us. Attention is always rewarded, but annunciations come on their own terms. Mary did not make a deal with Gabriel. Newton did not select his own spectrum. Proper attention requires the proper frame of reference. You do not watch the *chola* cactus grow without yourself slowing down. You don't see through the *sipapu* hole in the floor of a *kiva* without knowing that the character of the world can change so much that only a few survivors may rise into the new reality—the new frameshift.

My writing and music is about accepting annunciations, changing your frame of reference, and crossing thresholds into new realities. We cross thresholds at a child's birth and coming of age, at the death of a loved one, and in other moments of insight and

sacred encounter. *Annunciations*, my first musical work, was an oratorio about the angel's message to Mary. In my works, annunciations come in many forms: a crocodile's warning (*The Queen and the Crocodile*); a child's disappearance (*Shura*), a tattoo (*Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces*), a frequency distribution (*Spearpoints Bright*, second story in *FRAMESHIFTS*), a veteran's memories (*Amber*, a chamber opera), and even a virus that seems to have a message for its hosts (in the second volume of *FRAMESHIFTS*).

Sometimes nature's annunciations must be mediated, as when James Hansen explained the frameshift of climate change to a Congressional committee or when Bill McKibben wrote his book, *Eaarth*—giving a new name to our altered planet. In *Marking Time*, a memoir, my reflections are mediated by the mountains, wildlife, and people of New Mexico, where I lived as an adolescent. Avery Crawley, the weather-prophet in *FRAMESHIFTS*, comments on the way things and places seem to hold our memories:

**In some way, railing and cloud could be trusted;
They kept his memories, as did Ark and Salvage Yard.
These and his museums and Foxglove Center
Were his vessels for such memories . . .**

Returning to New Mexico after more than forty years, I found that many places and objects still held memories. Annunciations surrounded me. Perhaps, like the teepee stone formations of Cochiti, the annunciations had been there all along. The poet Basho wrote:

**Stillness—
soaking into the rocks,
the cicada's cries.**

Were so many annunciations soaked up by the desert during forty years, or was I finally quiet enough to hear them?

—*Richard L. Rose*



Other works by Richard L. Rose:

FRAMESHIFTS? *Two volumes? What is it?*

It is literary fiction made of multiple genres united by theme and character. At first glance, it appears to be a story collection, beginning with a mystery; but look at the back and you find a philosophical poem. Between the covers are mysteries, suspense stories, literary fiction, science fiction, love stories, fictional memoirs and letters, adventure stories, dramatic dialogues, and a section of poetic narrative made of dozens of forms—sestinas, sonnets, *terza rima*, *droeg-kvaet*, prose poems, ballads.

One may read the stories and poems in any sequence, but as one reads, a novel emerges. Its narrative concerns a fictional community in Northern Virginia from the current time to a disturbing future of climatic and social upheavals. Both volumes are listed on Amazon in hard copy and in Kindle versions. Rose's book blog is <http://www.frameshifts.com>. To find or add to the reviews on Amazon, look for *Frameshifts* by Richard L. Rose. A sample of *Frameshifts*, the mystery story *Death Wears A Tricorn*, is also available in multiple ebook platforms.

MARGINAL NOTES. Words and music, collected with personal papers, are on the website marginalnotesinwordsandmusic.org. Here find reference to the set of operas—*Annunciations*, *Amber*, *The People's Voice*, *The Books of Daniel*, *La Rinuncia*, and *The Profit of Doom*—as well as other works and information, including the sequel to *Frameshifts*, entitled *Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces* and information about works in progress, such as *Floats and Sinkers*, a poetry collection, *Marking Time*, a poetic memoir, and *The Fisher of the James*, a solo work retelling a Grimm Brothers' fairy tale about always wanting more than we have.

About Richard L. Rose

Richard L. Rose has retired from several careers, including teaching, medical laboratory work, environmental education and research, math and science supervision, and teaching science and science teaching methods in public schools and universities. After growing up “on the road” with a military family, described in the memoir *Marking Time*, he settled in Northern Virginia with his wife to raise two sons and follow his vocation of teaching and avocations of writing and musical composition.

Since retiring, he has produced a poetry collection, *Floats and Sinkers*, and a set of chamber operas, *Annunciations*, *The Books of Daniel*, *Amber*, *The People’s Voice*, and *The Profit of Doom*. Following his wife’s death and beginning a second marriage, he composed *La Rinuncia* and self-published the novel, *FRAMESHIFTS*, in 2011. All but the last of the operas were benefit concerts for groups like Amnesty, Habitat, and local charities. Another musical work, *The Fisher of the James*, on environmental concerns, and a set of stories, *Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces*, come from living in Richmond. The book and other projects are described on his website marginalnotesinwordsandmusic.org and book blog site, <http://www.frameshifts.com>. In his spare time, he collects rejection slips.

Recurrent themes are the transience of our lives and habitat and an insistence that we find effective ways to attend to this fact. By producing benefit concerts, reducing royalties, and recommending nonprofit organizations worthy of their attention, he invites readers to make their own creative responses. Perhaps readers of *FRAMESHIFTS* will be inspired to imagine and accomplish something positive for their communities. In writing, however, his intention is simply to tell a good story with interesting characters in surprising situations.

