

## Issue 6, Spring 2005



*"Ontology on the go!"*

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## Editorial

I had hoped to be writing this editorial during the Kerry administration, but, as was proved late last fall, the Dems we got now couldn't win a race against a blind hog with one trotter tied behind its back. And, yes, even though I do think we won Ohio, there's no good in looking back at something that isn't going to change. What we can look at is whether the Left can win anymore. And if it can't, what does that leave?

Well, if political resistance has become futile, then, for me, that leaves cultural resistance. Yes, I will still vote Dem and yes I will still support liberal and lefty causes, but I will also continue to write about the joys of Molly Kiely's sexy comics and review similar work. Because, folks, not all consenting adults might want to read "Diary of a Dominatrix," but it should always be possible for all consenting adults to read it. And that goes for all of free speech, even the stuff that makes me frown or squirm or want to throw up.

And so, in addition to my essay on Ms. Kiely and her support of the First Amendment, we have in this issue two lovely essays with historical leanings. In the first, from Kathryn L. Ramage, we have her voyage among Jane Austin's homes in the UK, and then John Emerson explains why iron made and makes all the difference in civilizations (or in conquering them).

The personal voice is not neglected here either. Dr. Kelly S. Taylor muses on Krazy Kat, newspaper comics, race, humor, and why she can't enjoy "Family Circus," but doesn't blame anyone for it. And Russell Smith shares his inner thoughts on life, grooming and Hollywood, which reminds me of the great Oscar Levant's quip: "Strip away the phony tinsel of Hollywood and you'll find the real tinsel underneath."

Or something.

I remain yours in the struggle.

Ginger Mayerson  
Spring 2005



**Kathryn L. Ramage**

## **The Jane Austen Tour**

*Being the recollections of Kathryn Ramage, with additional notes from her friend, Susan Hawman, on their literary travels*

My love for Jane Austen began when I first studied her novels as an undergraduate English Lit. student at a UK university in the mid-1980s. I visited a few places related to her work during those days -- Bath, Lyme -- but never made a complete tour before I returned to the States. Susan and I met each other in graduate school -- a mutual friend introduced her to me as "someone who loves Jane Austen as much as you do." So perhaps this adventure was inevitable for us, although we didn't discuss it seriously until a few months before we embarked on our journey.

In May of 2002, with only a week to travel in Hampshire, Dorset, and Somerset, Susan and I set out for England, armed with our favorite Austen novels and prepared to search out and visit not only the places where Austen once lived, but places referenced in her books. Other Janeites (as Austen's fans are called) may have done this more extensively or on more scholarly terms, but this was to be our personal exploration of Austen's world.

We made our base in Salisbury -- a city which has no connection with Jane Austen's life or novels, except that parts of the 1995 film version of *Sense and Sensibility* were filmed there and at the nearby stately home of Wilton -- but it provided a good central location for those Austen-related places that we intended to visit. Some of the locations are gone: Steventon parsonage, where Austen spent her childhood and youth, was torn down long ago, and the home in Castle Square in Southampton, where she lived from 1807 to 1809, is also erased from the modern seaport, but wherever some little part of her world remained, we were eager to go.

### **Lyme Regis in the Rain**

*They went to the sands, to watch the flowing of the tide, which a fine south-easterly breeze was bringing in with all the grandeur which so flat a shore admitted. They praised the morning; gloried in the sea; sympathized in the delight of the fresh-feeling breeze...*

***Persuasion, Chapter 12***

On the first official day of our tour, it is raining when we wake up. The one thing we especially wanted for our trip to Lyme is a sunny day -- or at least *not* a rainy one. "Maybe it'll be nicer in Lyme," I tell Susan.

We watch the weather report on the morning news, and are assured that it will be warm along England's southern coast (16° C) and "mostly dry." "Mostly dry" turns out to be one of those wry British understatements. It is wet and foggy all the way to Axminster, where we get off the train, and continues to rain as we take a local bus to Lyme Regis.

Lyme Regis is built on a slope that leads down to the English Channel. Austen describes "the principal street almost hurrying into the water", and the bus takes us down this same, very steep street through the heart of the town. We get off the bus near the bottom of the street, and head immediately toward the beach. It's low tide, and we walk on the sand along the water's edge until we reach the Cobb -- a long, winding stone structure that curves out into the water, built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to serve as a breakwater to protect the harbor and as a landing point for ships. The Cobb has an upper level, facing the open water, and a lower level on the landward side.

Austen is said to have paid several visits to Lyme, most notably in 1803. The town features in her final novel *Persuasion*; it is best known to Austen's readers as the place where Louisa Musgrove fell off the Cobb:

*There was too much wind to make the high part of the new Cobb pleasant for the ladies, and they agreed to get down the steps to the lower, and all were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa; she must be jumped down them by Captain Wentworth.... [S]he was safely down, and instantly, to show her enjoyment, ran up the steps to be jumped down again. He advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and talked in vain; she smiled and said, "I am determined I will: " he put out his hands; she was too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless!*

### ***Persuasion*, Chapter 12**

By visiting the site of Louisa's accident, we are better able to understand how it could have occurred.

The Cobb is wet and slippery and the top of the upper level slopes in the direction of the water, but we walk its length carefully on the inner rim, closest to the landward side. There are three sets of stairs on the inner side of the wall, leading from the upper to the lower level. The oldest and farthest out along the Cobb, which are called Granny's Teeth, are merely a series of stone slabs jutting out at intervals down the side of the wall. There is some debate among Austen scholars and readers about which set of steps Louisa was meant to be jumping down when she fell; however, since Granny's Teeth most certainly existed in Austen's day, they are most likely the ones that Louisa fell from. They look extremely precarious today, and Susan and I consider whether or not to climb down that way. Neither of us is as determined as Louisa, and we have no Captain Wentworth standing below waiting to catch us, so we decide against it, and go on out to the very end of the Cobb before returning to walk down one of the more modern and secure stairs.

The rain begins to come down harder as we return to the town along the Marine Parade -- the street that runs alongside the beach -- but we pause to consider which of the houses we're walking past might have belonged to the Harvilles (the family the party in *Persuasion* had come to Lyme to visit); the only clue we have is that the Harvilles' "small house" was "at the foot of an old pier," which has long since disappeared.

When we return to the town proper, we have lunch and then wander from the fossil shop to the local museum, through the churchyard, and along the new seafront Promenade; when I last visited the town in the mid-1980's, there was open beach here, with a row of stone groynes

extending into the water. At intervals, we say to each other, "It looks brighter -- it really does this time!" and then it rains some more.

Having done all we can in Lyme in the rain, we leave two hours earlier than planned. A half-hour wait at the Axminster train station gives us time to consult the railway information kiosk and make a few phone calls to plan our upcoming trip to Chawton. The sun finally comes out just as the train back to Salisbury arrives.

## Bath

*Half a minute conducted them through the pump-yard to the archway, opposite Union Passage; but here they were stopped. Everybody acquainted with Bath may remember the difficulties of crossing Cheap Street at this point; it is indeed a street of so impertinent a nature, so unfortunately connected with the great London and Oxford roads, and the principal inn of the city, that a day never passes in which parties of ladies, however important their business, whether in quest of pastry, millinery, or even (as in the present case) of young men, are not detained on one side or other by carriages, horsemen, or carts.*

### *Northanger Abbey, Chapter 7*

Jane Austen lived in Bath from 1801-06 and is still associated with it even though she wrote none of her published novels there. (One unfinished work, *The Watsons*, was set aside due to her father's ill health.) Two of her novels, however, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, partly take place in the city.

Susan has brought along a copy of *Persuasion*, and reads highlighted sections related to Bath on the train. We use these same passages, as well as a few from *Northanger Abbey*, for reference as we go in search of familiar locations in addition to the Austens' residences.

The Austen family lived in four different houses during their five-year stay in Bath; three of these survive, and we walk by two of them -- 13 Queen Square and 25 Gay Street -- before visiting the new Jane Austen Centre, also on Gay St. The Centre is new since my last visit to Bath, and has a lot of local historical information about the city as it was in Austen's day, plus information on her novels and the films and television series based on them; there are dozens of still photos taken from the films and series all around, and you can purchase as many of them as you like from the gift shop. Susan and I, having already completed our collections, pass on these to examine and purchase a few more unusual Austen-related items for ourselves or friends.

Our search for addresses also turns up the row of houses called "Westgate Buildings," where Mrs. Smith lived "in a very humble way," near the Cross Baths and hospital in *Persuasion*, and Camden Crescent (formerly Camden Place -- "a lofty, dignified situation") where the Eliots stayed; it's a steep climb uphill, but there is a wonderful view of the eastern side of the city once we reach the crescent. We then descend to look for a few *Northanger Abbey* locations, including those streets in the passage quoted above, and Milsom Street, where General Tilney and his family resided. We discuss Catherine Morland's dramatic run through the streets to the Tilney residence, and attempt to trace her path on our city map. From there, we cross the Avon river to walk down Pulteney Street, where Miss Morland stayed with the Allens. Here we also find a third Austen residence, 4 Sydney Place.

That afternoon, we have tea at the Pump Room, which was a key social meeting place in Austen's day. In *Northanger Abbey*, fashionable people "paraded up and down for an hour, looking at everybody," and Catherine Morland seemed to spend part of nearly every day during her stay at Bath in this activity. The room itself appears in the 1995 film version of *Persuasion* with the floor cleared for people to promenade. Today, the floor is crowded with tables, and visitors are served a very good three-course tea. You can also purchase a glass of the sulfuric-smelling Bath mineral water from a man in 18<sup>th</sup>-century costume who stands at one side of the room near the enormous copper pump that brings the water up from the underground spring; Susan, out of curiosity, does buy a glass and sets it aside after a sip or two. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century Pump Room is built atop the Roman ruins of the original spa that the town was created around, and tourists need only go downstairs to view them.

After tea, we continue our tour with a visit to the Upper Rooms just off the Circus (a circular street at the heart of Bath). There were once two Assembly Rooms in Bath -- public buildings where people would come for dances, to have tea, play cards, or attend other social activities. The Lower Assembly Rooms, where Catherine Morland was first introduced to Henry Tilney, are gone, but the "New" or Upper Assembly Rooms built in 1791 are preserved and open to visitors. In Austen's novels, these rooms are described as filled with crowds of people; there are a few other people there when Susan and I go in, but we find ourselves moving easily from one spacious and gloriously gilt-trimmed Augustan room to another and wonder together what it would have been like to attend a party here 200 years ago. Since we haven't done anything related to *Pride and Prejudice*, we agree to "take a turn" about the ballroom.

We end our trip to Bath with a hike up Beechen Cliff -- "that noble hill whose beautiful verdure and hanging coppice render it so striking an object from almost every opening in Bath," as it is described in *Northanger Abbey* when Catherine Morland goes for a walk there with the Tilneys. Today, the hill primarily overlooks the train station, but beyond that is a lovely vista of the city.

### **Chawton and Winchester**

*...I cannot recommend any admirer of Jane Austen to undertake a pilgrimage to this spot. The building indeed still stands, but it has lost all that gave it its character.*

*"A Memoir of Jane Austen," by J. E. Austen-Leigh, her nephew*

After her father's death in 1805, Jane, her mother, and her sister Cassandra were dependent upon the support of her brothers. They spent the next four years in Southampton with brother Frank, a naval officer, and his family, and in 1809 were given the use of a house in the village of Chawton, which belonged to another brother, Edward. Austen was to live there for the next nine years, and wrote or revised most of her novels for publication during that period. She left the house only in 1817, when the severity of her illness forced her to move into Winchester, where she spent the last six weeks of her life.

I had never been to Chawton before -- it is somewhat difficult to get to. From Salisbury, the journey involves taking an early train to Winchester, then taking a taxi to cross the city as quickly as possible to ensure we catch a bus leaving from the station less than half an hour later. To stop at Chawton, we have to ask the bus driver to let us off at a roundabout outside the

village, and we walk into Chawton from there. We arrive at 11:00 a.m., just as the house opens to visitors.

The house at Chawton is a perfectly ordinary country village home of red brick, but the fact that it was Jane's home makes it peculiarly thrilling. Even as we walk from the roundabout into Chawton and see the signs directing us to the house, we are excited. Austen's nephew may warn against undertaking a pilgrimage, but that's exactly what this journey is. The house is full of Austen-related memorabilia -- the earliest editions of her books, letters, family portraits and personal possessions -- but as we examine each room, my thoughts are along the lines of: *She sat in this window to look out for visitors coming in at the gate; She wrote Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion at this little table; or This was the view from her bedroom window* (No cars in the courtyard in her day). The yew trees in the garden were there 200 years ago, and she walked under them, as Susan and I did.

When we leave the house, we have lunch at a tea room called Cassandra's Cup, presumably named after Jane's elder sister, just across the street, then walk around the village, stopping at the St Nicholas's Church yard, where Jane's mother and her sister are buried. When we've finished our tour, we walk back up to catch the bus at the roundabout. On the way back to Salisbury, we stop at Winchester again to see the house where Austen died, 8 College Street, just behind the cathedral. This small, yellow-fronted house is not open to the public, so we walk by it on the opposite side of the street, then visit the cathedral to see where she is buried.

Austen's tombstone, a large, flat slab in the cathedral floor, makes no mention of her career as a novelist, but a small memorial on the wall a few feet away, set up at a later date, reveals that she was "known to many by her writings."

## Resources

Some Austen-related Web sites were of help to me in finding the dates for Austen's residence in her various homes, excerpts from her letters, and the names or addresses of locations I forgot to record in my travel journal:

The Jane Austen Centre (website: <http://www.janeausten.co.uk/centre/>)

The Jane Austen's House (website: <http://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk>)

HantsWeb (website: <http://www.hants.gov.uk/austen/index.html>)

Pemberley (website: <http://www.pemberley.com>)

*Kathryn L. Ramage lives in Maryland with her cats, Austen and Lucia. She studied literature at a British university, and likes to return to England for visits every 2 or 3 years.*



**Russell Smith**

## **My Nostril Hair**

When I was in my early twenties, an admirer looked at me fondly as we embraced on his couch and said, "You are perfect." He went on to elaborate about my perfect complexion, the soft skin that encased my firm muscles, etc. He even went on to say, "Even your eye brows are perfect. Do you trim them?"

It seemed like an odd question. No, I didn't trim my eye brows. I shaved most days and kept my hair cropped short. (This was during those post-mohawk days after the death of punk.) Besides hair cuts and clipping my nails, I needed little grooming. And I was perfect. I took his praise as my due. I might have said thank you, but I wasn't there for flattery, I was there for the pay off: money, presents, drugs -- the more tangible benefits of youth and beauty. More shallow and jaded than most, for the life in that big, corrupt city, the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., I was par for the course.

Perhaps I digress, dear reader, but I want to impress upon your minds the thoughts and thinking of a young man who was completely self-obsessed. That which did not relate to me directly in the course of my daily life was of no importance. In my mind it was impossible to conjecture a point in time when my youth and beauty would fade. That I might go on living into middle age and perhaps even old age was not a possibility that existed.

Flash forward, dear readers, to a quarter of a century later and a separate coast. Now I live in Hollywood. With pride I say that I live one block from the Boulevard of Stars. I can walk over to the Chinese Theater in five minutes, or I can get a tattoo or buy stripper clothes. Yeah, it's crawling with homeless people and hollow-eyed crack heads or crystal freaks, but compared to them, I look good. Damn good. I walk with good posture, my weight never climbed, I've got my bone structure and decades of nicotine still haven't completely ravaged my skin.

On the other hand, I do live also in Los Angeles, the most completely narcissistic city in the world. On the East Coast, only broadcast people and the like get plastic surgery for the most part. Here, everybody gets it. Eventually. I don't think my time will turn up soon, but the longer I live here, the closer that reality will come into being. Pasadena housewives get eye-jobs for their fortieth birthdays, to go on with other major examples would border on both the cruel and the boring.

It was when I moved to L.A. that I became obsessed with my nostril hair. I bought various electric trimmers that promised to eradicate all evidence of both nostril and ear hair. They all failed in their promises and I was reduced to shaving my ear lobes and plucking my nostril hairs, one by one. Don't ask me about the pain. The pain of plucking each hair, accompanied by sneezing fits that shook my spine like cheap prayer beads was nothing. Groans and tears were like a bathing in fire, a cleansing and justification for my continued self-absorption. The complete disgusting grossness of growing middle age stuck me just as I laid foot in Beauty Central.

Of course I joined a gym. There's one within walking distance anywhere in most parts of this town. I worked out religiously, ate whatever the hell I wanted, and still managed to look like your typical maybe-late twenties buff stud. But despite the warm sunshine, the people of Los Angeles are real fakes. To paraphrase someone who is a local. Angelinos are fake people. That's who they really are. At any rate, I met a lot of people and made lots of fake friends.

Then the day of reckoning came for me. I fell ill with an incurable digestive disorder. My weight dropped from buff to skinny. At one point, I looked like Iggy Pop I was so skinny. Here I was in an alien city, robbed of what I considered my greatest asset. (Granted, I'm extremely intelligent, but smart people get shit on every day. When you are beautiful, people treat you with respect.) I had to go on disability. I went on disability and floated around my tinsel town neighborhood, was diagnosed and healed to a certain degree. I never will be buff again, but I will always be thin and thin is always in.

It's difficult to grow old anywhere, but I think there is a special harshness to it in Los Angeles. The glare of the sun can reveal a shadow under the tiniest wrinkle. We live in the cultural center of the world and that culture is based on sex, youth, and beauty. Oh, shit! I forgot to mention violence, but that's another topic for another day.

Next column: My Left Ear: An Inspiring Story

*Russell Smith is well groomed and lives in Hollywood.*



**Ginger Mayerson**

## **Erotica, Utopia and Judicial Proceedings**

*A brief survey of Molly Kiely's art and life*

Of all the wonders in erotic comics, are there any more beautiful women than those drawn by Molly Kiely? In her eleven year career, Molly has produced an elegant body of comics, painting, illustration, and photography that represent the work of a woman pursuing her own happiness in her own way. How fortunate we are that Molly's erotic comics give us a vision of sex, occasionally extreme sex, that is neither degrading, horrifying, nor misogynistic. Her books are a landscape of lovers, commercial ventures, and the quest for love and personal fulfillment. Accomplishing this within the comics format is no mean feat, but Molly does it with seemingly effortless grace, wit, and a certain amount of verve.

Molly's sojourn in the world of erotic comics began in 1991, when she was asked illustrate an erotic comic for a fellow art student, who'd seen her pin-ups around the campus at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. The erotic comic was *Communion*, published by Eros in 1992 and no longer in print. If this was a defining moment, it was a quiet one; for Molly, drawing sexy ladies segued into drawing sexual congress as night into day.

This was the beginning of a busy two years for Molly. Her next commission was for *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, an adaptation of the Marquis de Sade novel, published by Wooley Comics in 1993 (now out of print). During this time, Mike Diana published in *Boiled Angel* #8 the drawings Molly had sent in based on the 'zine write-up in *Maximum Rock-n-Roll*. This was the last issue of *Boiled Angel* before Diana was brought to trial, convicted, and was given a bizarrely draconian sentence for publishing his comic, which a Florida jury found obscene. Although she was not called for Diana's trial, this would not be Molly's last brush with a freedom of speech controversy.

A visit to San Francisco in 1991 convinced Molly to move there. She did odd jobs to survive while working on her first solo comics for Eros -- *Diary of a Dominatrix* #1-3, published in 1994 and 1995.

The heroine of *Diary*, Zelda Zonk, makes her living humiliating grown men who pay well for such service. Mistress Zonk is the perfect small-business woman, running her concern efficiently and discreetly, streamlined so there is no waste and tailored to each client's particular needs. But only men come to her dungeon and is that because only men wish to buy their way into submission? Men are as randomly and haphazardly humiliated and brutalized by daily life, just as women are. But -- perhaps as a reflex of the masculine need to dominate their environment -- do they then seek out a dominatrix and the purity of being humiliated and brutalized in the safety and security of a script of their own making? Much of what is illustrated in Zonk's dungeon is no more painful than a Roling or a trip to the dentist and might be less expensive. Getting fired or enduring a hostile annual job performance is considerably more humiliating than what Molly illustrates in *Diary of a Dominatrix*. And, at least in Zelda's dungeon, the consequences of the ordeal don't follow the thrall back into the daily grind.

There is quite a lot of humor in the *Dominatrix* series. Advice on DIY circumcision and vasectomies is delivered in the most deadpan style and helpfully illustrated step by step. On the back cover of the collected *Diary of a Dominatrix*, the praise quotes from *Screw* and *Ms.* gaze at each other from across the barricades of female exploitation and female empowerment. Both and neither of these issues exist in *Diary*; Zelda Zonk is a woman making a living for herself outside of the mainstream. She is the construct of her creator, who is yet again a woman making a living for herself outside of the mainstream. It's a business, turning the woman as object of sexual domination into successful entrepreneur in the professional dom field. And if Molly is laughing all the way to the bank as she does it, well, brava! If Zelda Zonk is being exploited then she is exploiting her exploitation. This is not a new idea, but Molly's rendition dresses up an old idea in an elegant and amusing new rig.

1996 saw the Eros publication of Molly's next solo effort. In *Saucy Little Tart* #1-5, the quintet of comic books that chart the further adventures of Zelda and her boyfriend, Zeljko, they visit Zelda's twin sister, Zazu. Although Zazu claims to be an artist and illustrator, Zelda is the only one who has any kind of job. The reason she is visiting her sister in the first place is that she has professional burn-out, the thrill is gone, being a dominatrix has lost its charm. Zelda is on hiatus from her profession but, due to boredom or financial need, she takes two sessions: one with an old foot fetish client, where we learn what Morton's Foot is, and another session with a shy young man who later seduces Zazu. The five comic books that make up *Saucy Little Tart* are full of playful sex, mistaken identity, gender bending, role reversal, and some mild angst over love and work. However, once again, Molly manages to send a message under radar that there's more to a happy existence than convention, conformity and the approval of others. There's even a tongue-in-cheek redemption and forgiveness through cross-dressing and obedience riff in *Saucy Little Tart* #4 that might be offensive if it weren't so well and wittily executed.

Unfortunately, certain parts of Canadian Customs and Post Office seemed to find Molly's work offensive, and her work has been and continues to be haphazardly banned there. Now, I am one of those vaguely hopeful people who sees Canada as a wonderful and enlightened place. This opinion springs mainly from Canada's universal medical care, stance on reproductive rights, and that it gave asylum to young men who did not wish to be drafted between 1964 and 1972. Molly's father was one such young man who took refuge in Ontario in 1969, with his wife, who was six months pregnant with Molly. He never returned to the United States, even after President Carter pardoned them all in 1977. To me, Canada seems like a great place, so why was Molly's work banned there?

Subsection 163 of the Canadian Criminal Code has very definite laws concerning a very broad definition of obscenity. Customs can seize any works they determine to be demeaning to women or children. It is unclear how Molly's work falls into this category because all the acts depicted are consensual and do not involve sex with minors. However, there is no official ban on her work. Whether Molly's work is made available in Canadian bookstores or arrives in the post seems to be hit or miss. Molly herself had the hardest time getting her work in the mail when she lived in Canada in 1995. She could rarely send or receive packages to or from her publisher, Eros, without having them confiscated.

In 1996, Molly was called as a defense witness in the pornography trial of owner Ira Stohl and manager Kristina Hjelsand of Newsstand International in Bellingham, Washington. They were charged with promotion of pornography, which can carry a five year jail sentence and up to

\$10,000 in fines. The charge was brought by the Whatcom County prosecutor, based on a complaint by a local college student, for selling *Answer Me! #4*, also known as "the Rape Issue". Molly's two page strip, "I Was a Teenage Victim of Anal Date Rape", is the tamest thing in it.

The 'zine is uncomfortable reading. Although the photographs of dead, mutilated women nearly overwhelm the prose, the authors, mainly publisher Jim Goad, manage to make their points anyway. There is nothing pro-rape in pointing out how much rape there is in the world and writing about grisly examples. Nothing in the 'zine makes rape glamorous; it just reaffirms the repellent nature of the act from various points of view. However, it also illustrates the wide and creepy varieties of attitude and reaction to rape. There are rape jokes, there is a rape board game (for those who are interested in rape, but don't have time for the trouble of real rape), there are horrifying examples of rape, and there is expanded definition of rape that includes crimes of dubious sexual nature by children perpetrated on children. In his introduction, Jim Goad recalls with repulsion being molested by a schoolmate, but just a few pages later in "Let's Hear it for Violence Against Women", he recommends bashing out a woman's teeth if she talks too much. (It is puzzling that a man who writes so convincingly against violence toward women could write so vividly about its practice.)

This can be a dangerous world for all of us. In the case of date rape, the violence comes when least expected and from a known source; a voluntary association, perhaps even a friend. This causes its own special confused and conflicted brand of psychological and emotional pain, in addition to any physical trauma. Did she ask for it? How could she not have seen it coming? Was he hiding his true nature all these years? And, once the pain and horror are over, what if she liked it? Is it still rape if she dug it? Does that let him off the hook?

Molly does not pose these questions in her comic, let alone answer them. *Answer Me #4* is not the place for answers, it is the place for exposition, to shock but not enlighten, to elaborate but not explain. This might make it pointless sensationalism, but it certainly doesn't make it pornography.

Prepped by the defense team, Molly, wearing a natty calf-length pencil skirt and twin set, testified to the jury with a 400% blow up of her comic as a visual aid. "I explained my motivations and denied any intent to appeal to the prurient interest of *Answer Me's* audience," she later wrote in a three page graphic article for the 'zine *Inquisitor* volume 1, issue 4. Her date rape presents the rape as a fact. What led up to it, the aftermath, and that she and her boyfriend went on with their lives are also facts. As traumatic as it was, being raped did not destroy her life. As she writes in the *Inquisitor*, "It was my job to prove that 'I was a teenage victim of anal date rape' was not a smirking, trivialization of a rape victim nor a promotion of rape as earlier argued by the prosecution. One of their witnesses also stated that I hadn't reacted like a 'normal' rape victim ... " There is no such as thing as a 'normal' rape victim. Like Molly, each rape survivor deals with the assault and aftermath in their own way. If the medium Molly chose to explore such a heavy, scary subject as rape seems trivial, remember that a sledgehammer wrapped in velvet hits just as hard. What Molly's *Answer Me* comic does is lead the reader along to the conclusion that, for all the suffering date rape can cause, it is, with time and introspection, survivable. Countless thousands of words have been written and said to make the same argument that Molly makes with grace and compassion in thirteen panels. In this way, her art rises above its subject and engages the viewer on a deeper level than a more traditional format might allow.

Perhaps Molly has no more ulterior motive in her first graphic novel, *That Kind of Girl* (1999), than simply illustrating a road trip romp into the desert and out of society. It is the kind of fantasy of freedom, love, and spacious security we'd all like to live at least once yet never do because it's not that kind of world. It might be possible for a single woman to go out on her own, have intense sexual encounters with strangers and live to tell the tale -- or it might not. This is the beauty of erotic comics: we can watch what we might never have the opportunity or inclination to do ourselves. We see Molly's heroine, Dez Diva, the poet, repeatedly engage in safe sex (admirably, Molly makes condoms very sexy in all her work) with near total strangers, love 'em, leave 'em and roar off in her Honda del Sol. In real life, this would be risky behavior; in a comic, it's very sexy. It is also the story of a woman pursuing her desires on her own terms, and her road trip is just one way of doing this. The old adage, "She who travels fastest travels alone", could be applied to Dez Diva in *That Kind of Girl* or, for that matter, to any woman in a field that requires hours of solitary work and concentration, such as sequential art. Making art in the process of making a life is usually a solitary affair and although the product might be loved, the process is under-appreciated. *That Kind of Girl* is no less a quest than *On the Road* (and is certainly shorter and quite possibly more interesting). And it has lots of pictures, one of them being the back cover of *That Kind of Girl*, which has, to my wimpy, cringing straight sensibilities, an eye-widening image of cunnilingus. I believed I squeaked in alarm when I saw it.

It is difficult not to have a reaction to Molly's work and those reactions can be telling. People might try to avoid the lesbian sex scenes altogether; however, since they are at least a third of the story, it's impossible. The love scenes between Dez and Ruby (in fact, in all Molly's work) are startling, graphic, educational and beautiful -- all things that provoke a reader or at least wake one up. The pleasure and/or shock value in Molly's comics is in the looking, the detail that cannot be skimmed through; it's not that kind of book.

*That Kind of Girl* anchors itself in a familiar reality of roads, motels, cafes and third person storytelling. Molly's next graphic novel, *Tecopa Jane* (2000), slips those moorings almost completely. The reader is adrift in a sparse desert landscape of memory and dreams and even heaven itself. Now and then characters address the reader directly, but Tecopa early on warns us that she is the "true" narrator only because her name is the title.

*Tecopa Jane* is about lost and unrequited love. Whereas Dez Diva of *That Kind of Girl* stumbles upon the person who might be the love of her life, *Tecopa Jane* has found and lost that lover, Dixie, and is in the process of searching high and searching low for another girl that can come close. The sad part is that Dixie's very much alive brother, Violet (born girl, but turned boy around age eight) is deeply in love or lust with Tecopa, but cannot succeed with her because he is male. Violet might also prefer his fantasies about Tecopa to actually confronting her with his love because he never lets on in any way that he desires her. His fantasies and inner dialogues are drawn with all the usual vigor, but also with an appealing winsomeness that makes his solitude even more touching.

But solitude is not for Tecopa, who not only makes her longing known to those closest to her, she broadcasts it to the nighttime desert. Her bawdy rendition of "The Sheik of Araby" to an audience of rabbit, tortoise and crow is more a kick-ass stomp than lament. She dances, she howls, she hops around; it could almost be a rain dance. Those desert acoustics pay off -- a lone voice from beyond the hills answers and Tecopa lives happily to the endpapers of the book, which is forever as far as we readers are concerned.

Molly's most recent work has been a return to the comic book format in *On Your Knees Boy* (2001). I imagine this is addressing the male viewer because there isn't a man anywhere in this comic. However, there are lots of gorgeous women in pairs or on their own. There are also quaint kitchens, strap-ons, condoms and mile-high heels. There is something for everyone in this comic book and can be enjoyed even by a wimpy, cringing straight woman like me. Molly's lovely pin-ups are not the standard issue beauties Hollywood™ has been glorifying all these years. These women are curvaceous individuals in all shapes and sizes. I find that very welcome and wonderful to see after too many years of mainstream skinny women with implants, edging ever closer to the human version of a blow-up sex doll.

So, why sequential art when there is a whole world of expression to play in? For Molly, it's not lack of talent: She paints, she photographs, she's commissioned for illustrations, her figure drawing is superb, she writes coherently on her webpage, and yet her chosen mode of expression is sequential art. Perhaps the message is delivered more subtly, but with more impact if the medium appears innocuous. If so, that advantage is fading fast with the rise of graphic journalism and novels. The impact of words and illustrations together has been around forever but only lately seems to coming into a fuller, more mainstream bloom.

Molly says she has no issues or agenda to promote, and yet there is a subtle but discernable philosophy of personal freedom and fulfillment in her work. Her protagonists are individuals, pursuing their own dreams in their own ways. If their stories seem risky or their candor discomfiting, then it is a tribute to the artist's skill that it is nearly impossible to be indifferent to her work. Molly might not be trying to save the world one panel at a time, but she is showing her readers that there are other ways, outside of the mainstream's mores, to live happily ever after. And when this kind of tolerance, truth, and joy, no less, is being disseminated in erotic comic books, can utopia be far behind?

*You can see Molly Kiely's work at [www.MollyKiley.com](http://www.MollyKiley.com)*

*This essay originally appeared in the February 2004 issue of Sequential Tart e-zine.*

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**Kelly S. Taylor**

## **Krazy and Ignatz 1933-1934: Necromancy by the Blue Bean Bush**

*Krazy and Ignatz 1933-1934: Necromancy by the Blue Bean Bush*, George Herriman. Blackbeard and Ataker, Eds. Fanatagraphics, 2005

George Herriman's "Krazy Kat" is one of those works of artistry that is simultaneously very simple and very difficult to explain. Let's start with simple. "Krazy Kat" was a comic strip about the misadventures of a crazy cat that ran in newspapers from 1916 to 1944. Okay, here's the hard part. How do I start with this basic description and lead you to visualize "lyrical surrealist classic" instead of "Garfield"?

For almost a century now, literary notables such as e.e. cummings and Umberto Eco have been writing about this simple, crudely drawn comic strip. "Krazy Kat" was said to be Woodrow Wilson's favorite comic strip (Wilson, in case you've forgotten, was an American president who was famous for being smart -- if you can imagine that...). The strip was also beloved by William Randolph Hearst -- which was important not because Mr. Hearst was noted for his literary tastes, but because he published newspapers. He continued to run "Krazy Kat" despite the fact that people were so agitated by the strip that they wrote in to complain about it. Therefore many chains refused to run it. (I have to say, this degree of animosity towards a lowly comic strip is a mystery to me. From 1982-1986 I did keep a running total of how many consecutive days I could read "Family Circus" and never be tempted to laugh or smile. I just chalked it up to personal cynicism and never wrote in to complain, though.)

Like "Road Runner" cartoons, "Krazy Kat" only had one basic plotline that was iterated daily for its entire run. Ignatz, the mouse, with aggression not normally associated with mice, throws bricks at the head of Krazy, the cat. Offisa Pup, the dog, puts Ignatz in jail for doing so despite the fact that... well, now, here's the part where things start to get complicated... Krazy Kat does not wish to press charges for assault. Krazy loves Ignatz and takes each brick as proof of his love. Offisa Pup is in love with Krazy, who seems unaware of his affection. And Ignatz is in love with... throwing bricks, I think. It's hard to say. He's not overly affectionate towards anyone -- even his wife and children.

Although Offisa Pup and Ignatz are clearly identified as males, Krazy's gender is something of a mystery. Readers are given contradictory clues and are left to draw their own conclusions. Poet e.e. cummings came down of the female side of the question. He describes the trio's relationships as follows, "To our softheaded altruist, she is the adorably helpless incarnation of saintliness. To our hardhearted egoist, she is the puzzlingly indestructible embodiment of idiocy. The benevolent overdog sees her as an inspired weakling. The malevolent undermouse views her as a born target. Meanwhile Krazy Kat, through double misunderstanding, fulfills her joyous destiny."

Gentle Reader, I hope you can sense that we have left the territory of the comic antics of the likes of "Marmaduke" and have now moved on to the sweet plains of high metaphor. Umberto Eco wrote of the strip's repetitive plot that, "It was thanks only to this that the mouse's arrogance, the dog's unrewarded compassion, and the cat's desperate love could arrive at what critics felt was a

genuine state of poetry, an uninterrupted elegy based on sorrowing innocence. In a comic of this sort, the spectator, not seduced by a flood of gags, by any realistic or caricatural reference, by any appeal to sex and violence, freed then from the routine of a taste that led him to seek in the comic strip the satisfaction of certain requirements, could thus discover the possibility of a purely allusive world, a pleasure of a 'musical' nature, an interplay of feelings that were not banal."

"Krazy Kat" was, to broadly paraphrase Jack Kerouac, a metaphor for...durn near everything... Okay, that paraphrase got so broad I missed Kerouac entirely and wound up paraphrasing Snuffy Smith instead. "Krazy Kat" is a simple story about passion -- the self-less, unreasoning, uncontrollable passion we humans sometimes feel for that which, despite our fervor, does not necessarily have our best interests in mind. The strip can therefore be seen as being commentary on relationships, religion, politics, rebellion, masochism, existentialism... well, as I said before, durn near everything.

*Krazy and Ignatz: Necromancy by the Blue Bean Bush* is a particularly loving collection of rare strips circa 1933-34 from the good people at Fantagraphics (who, if you're a big fan of classic comics like I am, are already your best friends from way back). The cover and interior artwork by Chris Ware are just nouveou-deco delicious. Or as I'm sure Krazy would declare, "Werra priddy an' werra, werra gojjiss!"

For newcomers to the series, I will warn that the strips that appear in this volume are chosen for their rarity, not their excellence. As a result, the reader gets an average sampling of the comic instead of a "greatest hits" collection. That's not necessarily a bad thing. These strips were created before the death of Herriman's wife and the onset of arthritis that caused a decline in the quality of the last few years of "Krazy Kat's" run.

For the collector, this volume is an unmitigated "I love you" brick to the head. Herriman's artwork has been painstakingly restored in clear full-page form. The editors have also unearthed publicity pieces about Herriman and samplings of other strips by the artist. For the most part, I'm afraid these other comics are primarily of the "there but for the grace of Krazy goes Herriman" variety. His non-Kat strips were remarkably unremarkable. It gives one pause to consider that same person voted the best comic artist of the 20th century by the editorial board of *The Comics Journal* and widely called a genius could produce such uninspired, formulaic, and pedestrian works as "The Amours of Marie Anne McGee."

I was intrigued to see that this volume contains a few examples of Herriman's non-Kat strips that focus on African American characters. Although offensive by today's standards, the sort of "darktown" humor sampled here was a staple of the time. The strips interest me because in contradiction to all the self-penned publicity blurbs included in this volume, Herriman was born in New Orleans, not Los Angeles. His birth certificate records his race as "colored." George Herriman was a black man born in New Orleans who died a white man in New York.

His African-American characters are drawn in accordance with the accepted iconography of racial stereotyping of that day. Their heads are colored black except for large circles of white around their eyes and mouth. Let your eyes drift across to the next page and you may notice Krazy Kat's black head relieved only by his white-circled eyes and mouth. Kinda adds another

layer to a story about learning to love the bricks thrown at your head, doesn't it? See, I told you. "Krazy Kat" is about durn near everything...

Buy the book. Enjoy a simple cartoon. Think deep thoughts.

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**John Emerson**

## **The Coming of the Age of Iron**

*The Coming of the Age of Iron*, Theodore Wertime and James Muhly, eds., Yale, 1980.

*The End of the Bronze Age*, Robert Drews, Princeton, 1993.

In the 1820s the Danish archaeologist Christian Jürgensen Thomsen divided human prehistory into three stages, basing his division on the materials used to make weapons and tools: the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. These were probably distant descendants of Hesiod's four ages (Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron), though Hesiod's ages were a declining series, with each age crueler and more corrupt than the one before, whereas Thomsen was describing a progressive advance to ever-higher levels. The term "Iron Age" still pops up now and then as a cliché, even though it has been abandoned by archeology.

During the colonial and post-colonial periods, steel production was often used as an index of progress, and even in countries without supplies of ore (notably Mongolia) steel mills were built to produce steel that was hardly even needed. The mystique of steel was especially strong among Communists. "Stalin" means something like "man of steel", and Lenin (website: [http://www.objectivistcenter.org/articles/hdickman\\_parasites-paradise.asp](http://www.objectivistcenter.org/articles/hdickman_parasites-paradise.asp)) used steel as a metaphor for the perfect philosophy of Marx: "From the philosophy of Marxism, cast of one piece of steel, it is impossible to expunge a single basic premise, a single essential part, without deviating from objective truth." When Mao put decentralized backyard steel mills at the center of his demented economic plan, it was a most peculiar hybrid of Bolshevik steel-worship and Gandhian self-reliance (which in India was based on home spinning and weaving).

It is likely that Stalin's choice of a steel-based pseudonym had a second underlying implication, besides the commitment to industrial development. Before the nineteenth century steel mostly meant weapons, especially swords: "Now is steel twixt gut and bladder interposed" (website: <http://www.paulgross.org/fringe.html>). Among the Turks and Mongols of the steppe (who ruled parts of Russia for centuries), the name Temur (or Timur), meaning iron or steel, was quite common. The ruthless Tamerlane's true name was Timur; several Mongol emperors were named Temur; and Genghis Khan's personal name was Temujin (which means "Smith").<sup>1</sup>

*The Coming of the Age of Iron* gives you lots of detail about the early history of iron and steel technology. The book isn't well-edited, with a mediocre index, lots of loose ends, and one table printed partly upside-down -- so that it isn't right no matter which way you turn the book. It's a fun book, though, if you like to wrestle with puzzles, and there's lots of new vocabulary like "carburization", "cuppulation", "cementite" (= iron carbide) and "sponge iron", together with new technical meanings of such familiar words as "quench", "bloom", and "flux".

The quick picture is that in the eastern Mediterranean area between 1200 BC and 1000 BC, iron and steel rather abruptly came into heavy use, mostly for making weapons, and that they gradually spread from there<sup>2</sup>. Iron had been produced in small quantities for centuries before that ("sporadic iron"), but it had never been very important, and at one point iron was a precious metal worth forty times its weight in silver.

The antecedents to iron-smelting were many: the use for paint, as far back as the Old Stone Age, of red, yellow, and brown ochre (all of which are iron ores)<sup>3</sup>; the kiln technology used in making glass, pottery, cement, and terra cotta; the smelting of tin, copper, and lead from their ores; and the production of alloys such as bronze. The turning point came when the controlled production of carburized steel became possible, since pure iron is too soft. There's a metaphysical irony here: because steel is superior to iron, it has always been assumed that it has been purified by fire; but the fact is that iron is pure and steel is impure -- the charcoal fire changes ferrite (pure iron) into iron carbide.

This book, together with Robert Drews' *The End of the Bronze Age* makes it pretty clear that iron and steel didn't make anything happen. The rise of iron roughly coincided with a series of invasions which brought down many of the empires of the Eastern Mediterranean (notably Troy), but the evidence tells us that the invasions came first, and that the heavily militarized conquering nations afterwards developed steel technology for military uses. During the nineteenth century it was often thought that technological changes (or access to resources) caused social changes, but nowadays it is more often thought, as in this case, that the social changes led to the increased exploitation of already-existing technology and resources.

In the literary records of this transition there is a tendency toward nostalgia. It was from the point of view of the defeated older cultures that Hesiod's more militaristic Iron Age was worse than the preceding Bronze Age, and it has been noted that while the society Homer wrote about was clearly a Bronze Age culture, the language of Homer's own writing uses many Iron Age metaphors (notably a lengthy comparison of the blinding of the Cyclops Polyphemus to the tempering of a sword by quenching).

If iron is thought of as a marker or a result rather than as a cause, the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age was a reality. The conquered empires used bronze and practiced chariot warfare, whereas the conquering nations were barbarian border peoples who fought as infantry -- and who, after their conquests, developed steel technology for military purposes. (Neither book underlines the point, but it seems that in the beginning steel was almost entirely used for weapons, only later for tools, and last of all for structural purposes.)

After 1000 AD iron and steel technology spread rather erratically, without much relation to civilizational level. Iron came late to Egypt and India<sup>4</sup> despite their well-developed civilizations, and the barbarous steppe peoples (Scythians, Huns, and Turks) smelted their own iron quite early, as did the Celts and Teutons. (According to their own legends as well as Chinese reports, the earliest Turks were metallurgical specialists). Before the arrival of Europeans, sub-Saharan Africa had developed its own iron and steel technologies, some of which were quite sophisticated and were taken to the New World by the Portuguese.

With the Industrial Revolution production ballooned, and iron and steel acquired a much wider range of uses and came to be taken as index of economic development and prosperity. (Probably this is what led to the overestimation of the importance of iron in prehistory). In 2004 the world produced an astonishing billion tons of iron and steel. Today the Chinese steel industry is by far the largest, so if iron and steel really had the key importance people sometimes give it, the rest of us would be in serious trouble.

## Resources:

African metallurgy brought by slaves to the New World (website: <http://www.afrigenas.com/slavedata/Paper-LSU-1492-1992.html>)

Documentary on African metallurgy (website: <http://www.der.org/films/inagina.html>)

### Notes:

1. Genghis Khan also had a Nestorian Christian daughter (whose husband was an Onggut Turkish Christian named George), and one of Genghis Khan's grandsons was a Catholic convert. But there was no brother Don, no matter what Bob Dylan says.

2 In several respects the island of Cyprus had a special importance in the development of metallurgy. It is even sometimes thought that the name "Cyprus" was derived from the word "cuprum" for copper, but the truth is more interesting than that. The Greek word for copper was "aes", but Cyprus was so important in the copper trade that the phrase "aes Cyprium" (copper of Cyprus) became common in Latin, later to be shortened to "Cyprium" and then "cuprum".

It is sometimes claimed that the Hittites and the Philistines had a special importance in the development of iron and steel technology, but the authors in the Wertime-Muhly book found no solid evidence of this.

3 In the real world, and not just in symbolism, the color red is often a sign of the presence of iron. Besides red ochre, blood (from hemoglobin), rust, and the planet Mars are reddened by iron compounds. Most oxygen-carriers are pigments, as is chlorophyll, and species with non-iron-based oxygen-carriers have green, blue, or purple blood. (More at this webpage: <http://www.idiocentrism.com/hemoglobin.htm>).

4 The Wertime-Muhly book says little about India, leading me to believe that iron and steel came to India very late. During the early Christian era India developed a steel industry producing the highly-prized "Damascene" or "wootz" steel, but Googling finds little evidence of an Indian steel industry before that time -- though there are quite a number of unattested nationalistic claims

*This essay originally appeared at Idiocentrism (website: <http://idiocentrism.com/>)*

*Born in rural Minnesota in 1946, in 2002 John J. Emerson took early retirement from an undistinguished career in the medical field to devote himself to writing and study. He graduated from Portland State University in 1980 after having attended Reed College. He lived in Taiwan for a year in 1983 and loved it. He is divorced, separated, or single with a grown son who is a musician, and lives in poverty in Portland, Oregon. Please visit his site, Idiocentrism (website: <http://idiocentrism.com/>), for more of his essays.*



## **Ginger Mayerson and Laurel Sutton**

### **An Interview with Jon Carroll**

*Jon Carroll has been a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle for 15 years (15 arduous years of five columns a week). In his own words, he is an "unexpected veteran of cyberspace; husband, father and model citizen; physical coward; purveyor of fine Treasure Hunts; dedicated hiker; his classic good looks are highlighted by his wry grin and modest demeanor." A collection of his columns, , Near Life Experiences, was published in 1993. He gave editors Sutton and Mayerson this interview in February of 2004.*

**Laurel Sutton:** You write three columns a week (down from five) plus occasional pieces for the Chronicle. What do you read or watch to keep up with current affairs? Daily newspapers, online columnists, magazines? Do you read any comic strips daily?

**Jon Carroll:** I read the Chronicle and the New York Times, plus the New York Review of Books, the New Yorker and other stuff as I hear about interesting articles. The only regular "news" TV I watch is the Daily Show, although I'll occasionally be captured by something CSPAN. I like Survivor a lot, but that's probably not relevant. Online, I read Altercation, Daily KOS, the Note, Riverbend, WorldChanging and whatever links seem choice. I read Boondocks.

**LS:** What fiction are you currently reading?

**JC:** Just finished the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Other recent fiction *Love Trouble*, *Gun With Occasional Music*, *Wonder Boys*, *The Murder Room*. The best book overall I've read this year is *Master of the Senate* by Robert Caro - just astonishing.

**LS:** Do you consider yourself a writer or a journalist? What is the distinction?

**JC:** Hey, it's your question; I dunno what the distinction is. But I'm not patient enough to be a good journalist, so I'm probably a writer. Or a waiter disguised as a writer.

**LS:** Which writers should be required reading for other writers? Which humor writers set the standard?

**JC:** Mark Twain set the standard; the rest is just ornamentation. I like S.J. Perelman, James Thurber, Veronica Geng, Lynda Barry, Ian Frazier, Robert Benchley. Roy Blount - I am probably leaving out a lot of people.

**Ginger Mayerson:** What are you most proud of in your career so far?

**JC:** Remaining employed continuously for 22 years.

**LS:** In your writing, it's obvious how much care you put into choosing the correct word or turn of phrase, and you're constantly playing with language in an intelligent, informed way. Why is there so much bad and sloppy writing getting published? Is it really worse now, or are we just more aware of it?

**JC:** Yes, I am intelligent and informed; good of you to notice. I think Sturgeon's Law applies here - 90 per cent of everything is crap. So I doubt there's been much of a change. I do think that op ed writing has taken a huge nosedive - it's all didactic crap, mostly by academics or think tank people or "experts." They don't care about prose, and it shows.

**LS:** You are a self-professed agnostic. What place does religion have in our lives? Can you be moral without belief in God?

**JC:** Of course you can be moral without a belief in God - hell, you can be moral without a belief in morals. What I like best about religion is the ritual - we have gotten away from understanding the importance of ritual on connecting us with the great mysteries. I spent my 60th birthday sitting in a graveyard in an Indian village in Mexico, for midnight to dawn, watching the Day of the Dead rituals. It was extremely moving, partly because no one was telling me how to feel or what to think. This Christmas, for the first time ever, we hung lights on our house - not because we believe in Christmas, but because we believe in lights.

**LS:** Why is the current administration so hell-bent on Christianizing the world? It has very little to do with Christ.

**JC:** The current administration is pandering to the religious right.

**LS:** Are there any themes or topics that you feel you cannot explore in your column? How much control (or censorship) does the Chronicle exert over your writing?

**JC:** The Chronicle exerts no censorship. It's quite lovely that way. I have to avoid libeling people and typing dirty words, of course. I try not to write about things I know nothing about. Also, there are areas of my personal life I choose not to write about, mostly for the reasons of other people's privacy. I sorta lost claim to my own privacy 20 years ago. I'm not sure that was a good idea.

**LS:** What did you have for breakfast this morning?

**JC:** Complete brand cereal with sliced bananas.

### **Political**

**GM:** Do you have any idea what GW Bush's appeal is?

**JC:** I think some people perceive him as friendly, sincere and upright. It's not an image that would mean a lot of me - I like cranky, smart, imaginative politicians myself - but I understand that other people might. The image is a lie, of course, but images often are.

**LS:** Is John Ashcroft really Caligula?

**JC:** Didn't Caligula have a lot of fun at orgies and stuff? (A journalist would look that up). I can't imagine John Ashcroft having fun at orgy, or having fun at all. I think Caligula also drank to excess. Probably a more interesting guy than Ashcroft.

**GM:** If John Ashcroft could be Caligula for a day, what's the first thing he'd do?

**JC:** Change his toga.

**GM:** How much abuse, including what kinds of violent threats, are you getting for your dead on the money critiques of the Bush administration?

**JC:** Oh well, most of them have given up. I used to get called a traitor every day, now it's down to one a week or so. I've never had my life seriously threatened, although many people have described places on my body where they'd like to insert a red hot poker. But they were never actually holding a red hot poker.

**LS:** Do you agree with GB Shaw that "Democracy is a device that insures we shall be governed no better than we deserve"? Do we deserve the current administration?

**JC:** Well, I don't deserve it, that's for damn sure.

**GM:** In your opinion, what's the most appalling thing the Bush administration has done in the past 3 or so years? Perhaps you have a top five most appalling Bush administration acts?

**JC:** Gosh, Mom, do I have to choose? I think probably selling the government to the corporations is probably the most lasting legacy of awfulness he's brought. Or maybe it's the emerging police state. Or, wait, the suspension of habeas corpus. No, how about the gutting of environmental laws? We could be here for hours.

**LS:** Who will win the next presidential election? Who should win the next presidential election?

**JC:** John Kerry (will win); Barney Frank (should win).

**GM:** How does a guy like Rick Santorum become a US Senator in the 21st Century? He seems to be running on the Hate and Anger platform. Are there that many angry voters out there and, if so, why do you think that is?

**JC:** I think lots of people feel they have lost control of their lives, and they're looking for someone to blame. Usually it's some version of the Other, and so people who find a few convenient Others to blame can get elected.

**GM:** I feel that we need a Martin Luther King, Jr. to rally us to save ourselves from the Bush administration. Do you think this might be true and, if so, where and how is this person going to come to the forefront? If you think we're never going to see another Dr. King or even the spirit of those times, why is that and is there any cure for it?

**JC:** Oh, I think we need to wait for the Bush administration to hang itself. The real problem is: What are we going to do with country once we get it back? I hope more people are thinking about that.

People like Martin Luther King are gifts from the cosmos. We had two others in the 20th century, Mandela and Gandhi. That's a pretty good quota. It would sure be nice to have someone else like that, but we can't depend on the cosmos to bail us out. We have to do the work ourselves - that's the bad news.

**GM:** Due to media consolidation, are we doomed to nothing but rant radio for ever and ever? Do you have any thoughts on why conservative anger radio sells so well nowadays?

**JC:** I never hear rant radio, so I'm not sure. The only AM radio I listen to is baseball games. As to why it sells: See Rick Santorum, above.

**GM:** Is there such a thing as liberal hate and fear mongering? Where is the passion in the Left?

**JC:** We're all capable of hate-mongering; Dr. King would remind us that hating the haters is spiritually destructive. As someone once told me: Pray for your enemies; it drives them crazy. I see a lot of passion on the left, but then I'm a very attractive guy.

**GM:** What are your thoughts on the California recall and our new Governor?

**JC:** It happened; now he's there. He's entirely insignificant.

**GM:** I understand that California is the sixth or seventh largest economy in the world. That being so, why are the state coffers empty and is there a \$15B bonds issue on the March ballot? Do you have any thought on how the thinking or greed (or whatever it is) that caused this can be addressed constructively, let alone remedied?

**JC:** The problem is the taxes are too low. Takes money to run a government. Eventually, just before all the schools close, people will realize that.

## **Cultural**

**LS:** What's your favorite movie pre-1970 and why?

**JC:** "Singing in the Rain," because it makes me smile. I know I should say "The Apu Trilogy" or something.

**LS:** Which side are you on in the nature vs. nurture debate? What makes some people grow up to be SUV-driving inconsiderate jackasses? What steps did you take to insure this didn't happen to your children? Your children have turned out to be decent adults.

**JC:** Anyone who has kids knows the answer: It's nature. Nurture isn't even in second place. Parents can of course have a negative impact, in obvious ways, but everything else is cellular. My daughters are amazing adults and I love them without reserve, but that's not because of anything I did. Oh, wait, I made sure they listened to lots of Van Morrison.

**GM:** Leaving aside that this interview is being conducted via email, do you like the internet or are you just tolerating it because it will not go away?

**JC:** I LUV the Internet. I've been online since 1987, on the Well before the World Wide Web was even invented. I had a good thing going there for a decade, until everyone figured out where I was getting my column ideas

**LS:** How many books do you own?

**JC:** Last time we moved, we had a 120 boxes of books. Figure, what, 15 books to a box; 30 if it's paperbacks. (You do the math, please; I don't want to). And I've probably doubled my collection since then. Way too many. There's a dust issue.

### **Lightning round**

**JC:** I somehow managed to lose this part of the interview. As far as I remember the questions, the answers are persimmons, the Beatles, oh God my brain just went dead. I'll make up my own answers: Miles Davis, ballet, bathmats, tulips, soy milk, Richard Powers and France.

**LS and GM:** Those are great answers. Thank you, Mr. Carroll.

