

LOVE Backwards is EVOL

--R. W. Watkins

It's hard to believe that it's been just over twenty years since Nirvana and Pearl Jam issued their mega-breakthrough albums. Where were you the first time you heard 'Teen Spirit' or 'Even Flow'? This month marks the twentieth anniversary of Freddie Mercury's death by AIDS. What were you wearing in the fall of '91? Had you graduated to plaid flannel and hiking boots yet?

What's even harder to believe is the fact that it's been nearly twenty-five years since the Black-Monday stock-market crash, Sonic Youth released *Sister*, and the beginning of the end of the horrible '80s. Christ. I can remember Faron 'Huotz' Jennings and I-dressed from head to toe in black, and sporting wraparound shades and more hair than Uriah Heep on their '72 tour-stomping like frenzied madmen along the harbour-overlooking roads of our home village, Faron reciting loudly for the benefit of bumptious local schoolgirls and born-again seniors:

*Why should we kick up a fuss?
It's like squeezing a huge sack of pus.
When the temperature's gone to a plus,
Why should we kick up a fuss?*

One just knew that improvisation like that would hold great social significance a quarter of a century later. Like the Rolling Stones' 'lips' logo, tattooed-using ashes and toothpaste-on my late friend Harold Jennings's arm, while in prison for the umpteenth time.

Nineteen-eighty-seven was a year riddled with wormholes: The Joshua Tree on the radio, Sgt Pepper nostalgia on the telly; Blue Velvet on VHS, Blue Liz as Cleopatra on the Obituary page; The Watchmen in the comics racks, The Dharma Bums back in paperback courtesy of Signet. I can remember coming home from school on a Friday evening dressed like something out of a Cure video; eating dinner, listening to the Jefferson Airplane's 'It's No Secret', and then heading out to the local pool hall wearing striped trousers and a headband. I can also recall some friends and I checking in on a female classmate minding our English teacher's toddlers. We robbed his refrigerator of beer and then did the mandatory perusal of his record collection. Ironically, I found it to be a near-perfect replica of my own collection. It was one of those profound, revelatory moments straight out of Lynch or Cronenberg-when Sheryl Lee realises she's been nailing her father, or Jeremy Irons discovers his girlfriend has a penis. So fittingly, The Grateful Dead released a comeback album in 1987, scoring themselves a Top Twenty hit single in the process.

With hindsight, this Po-Mo mish-mashing-or cultural time travelling, or retro reharnessing, or whatever the hell it was-was quite historically appropriate; for it was out of this period that the alternative literary scene of 'Generations' X and Y was largely born.

'Alternative literature' is all about eccentric interest in The Past and/or The Other. If you edited a zine dedicated to elephants' penises when you were 13 years old in 1984, then you are undoubtedly an alternative writer today. If you own a copy of Metallica's *Ride The Lightning* on Megaforce Records, before it was reissued by Elektra, then you are undoubtedly an alternative writer today. If you masturbated long and hard, thinking of James Dean or Barbara Stanwyck, then you are undoubtedly an alternative writer today. It's all about stitching a pathway to perceived coolness. And people of North America and Western Europe have a bizarre knack for (eventually) sanctifying the Ancient and the Obscure: If the Arch Bishop of Canterbury or the author of the latest Jim Morrison biography says it's cool, then we are gods...at their command and disposal.

Icons, icons....

Jim Morrison refused to attend his high-school prom. Smart man.

If you're between the ages of 38 and 45 and you weren't a viewer of *The Simpsons*, *Twin Peaks* or *Northern Exposure* back in 1990, one can rest assured that you're not even a reader today, let alone a writer.

It has come to light that when the first nine episodes of cutting-edge adolescents' show *Grange Hill* originally aired on the BBC in 1978, future journalist Lucinda Duckett didn't even bother tuning in half the time to see herself play the iconically prudent Ann Wilson. That's not neglect or disregard. That's confidence-in something else.

I can think of only one common English noun that has become extinct throughout the entire British Commonwealth in my lifetime: the wireless. Can you imagine 'Dance, dance, dance, dance to the wireless'? The term so common once upon a time, the Queen Mum drank her gin all the way til the bitter end.

Just like grunge rock was more about the grunge than the rock, the alternative literary scene is probably more about the alternative than the literary. You know you're an alternative writer when you're more concerned about Alan Moore or Lee Ranaldo reading your stuff on a toilet wall than what you are Martin Amis or Margaret Atwood dropping your name on television.

It's been now ten years since I sent the following letter of poetical acquiescence to Hans Jongman at Haiku Canada:

"Mr Jongman:

"Please find enclosed a \$20 money order to the Haiku Canada Newsletter. Please start my subscription with your most recently published issue-this way, I won't have to wait two years to find out you're still alive. As for my becoming a member of your society, well... remember that scene from *Batman Returns*, where all the elites at an exclusive Gotham party are introduced to the reclusive, ill-formed Penguin, who proceeds to eat raw fish with his bare 'claws'? You get the picture....