

ROARSHOCK PAGE

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Now has come December, and the world looks quite different than it did just a year ago, and in ways not even ROARSHOCK PAGE could predict.

A POET IN PARIS

On Sundays things tend to slow down a bit in Paris. Many businesses are closed, traffic remains rather light, and lots of people are out for a relaxed stroll in good weather, or to sit along a Quai to watch the changing sky and boats on the flowing waters of the Seine. Religious artifacts are everywhere rising out of the bones of European history and human environment, and many people remain deeply religious even in the 21st century, but without the same prevalence of childish religiosity which can be so absurd and annoying in the United States.

A late summer heat wave sizzled Paris on that Monday afternoon which saw me climb the internal spiral staircase to the top of the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile. Quite a journey around and around spiraling upward from the pavement and the eternal flame that burns and flickers at the grave of the Unknown Soldier, and what a view after emerging onto the roof of the monument. All of Paris seemed spread out on display before me, shimmering in the hot light of the September afternoon. A photograph shows me standing there with the Eiffel Tower in the background — I have on dark glasses and a tropical-style shirt; the presence of a slight breeze ruffled my hair. After descending again, I deemed the afternoon too hot to walk back along the Champs-Élysées, so descended below ground to the relatively cool tunnels of the Métro and rode to the stop at the Hôtel de Ville. Five o'clock had rolled around and shadows were growing longer, but it remained an exceptionally hot afternoon. I was still a little sad that over on the Left Bank, La Petite Taverne on the Rue de la Huchette — where I had enjoyed the ambiance and Happy Hour beers on previous Paris visits — had burned down not too long before, the whole little building was gone, and the bar was closed forever. I wondered what had become of the gruff Parisian bartender and his not quite as gruff, and English

speaking, younger brother. I continued along the little street past the garish screaming tourist traps, most with their beckoning barkers out front. On the left suddenly was the Bull's Brothers Pub which screamed especially loudly at me, so I went in and drank some draft Belgian witbier at a bargain price. They had weird fake Texas/American decorations inside, and then a guy who worked there stepped out into the pedestrian street wearing an enormous phony bull's head, encouraging other passers-by to step in and drink. He offered me the big bull's head to wear, which I did (I mean, why not?), and had another picture taken looking and feeling like a personification of an ancient Celtic zoomorphic bull deity, even as depicted on reliefs nearby at Notre-Dame de Paris. Religion invariably builds upon earlier traditions from the deep human archetypes, and the dying god motif exists in Christianity and in the ancient rituals of sacrificial bulls. Pliny the Elder wrote in the first century of the white-clad druids of Gaul, who climbed the sacred oak and cut down mistletoe growing on it with a golden sickle. The mistletoe was caught in a white cloak, and then two white bulls were sacrificed. The mistletoe was blended in a drink which was used to cure infertility and as an antidote to all poisons. It's my firm hunch that the conclusion of this Celtic religious ceremony of the Dun Cow was a big steak dinner. Feeling somewhat refreshed, I went to the hotel room along the Boulevard Saint-Michel, even as the early evening remained very hot. The beer inside made for a nice mellow buzz, and a parfait cup and cold glass of champagne in the hotel lobby added to a sense of well-being. Up in the tiny room, a breeze through the open window, I wanted to wrestle with my Muse. My mind was flying in amorous and sensual patterns, and then I remembered the poetry reading starting soon, and pretty far across town too. In my head, in the room I heard the sweet voice of my Muse, telling me time enough later for love and dreams of love-making, now must I go to read poems tonight in Paris. Back out onto the Boulevard and the whole city seemingly full of traffic all in a rush and honking many horns. At last the hail was answered and a taxi stopped and was told the address for the bar, Au Chat Noir on Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud. Across the river and through town we raced, the driver weaving and working his way through the heavy traffic. He turned to me with a wry

smile and a shrug, "It's Paris!" My first crazy taxi ride through Paris, and in good time I was dropped off outside the crowded bar on the busy street. It was only later, looking at the map, that I became conscious of how close this was to the Bataclan music hall and other places attacked the year before by suicide death cultists. Many people had been murdered, dying gods all, and they were the same as the people out that hot Monday evening, and I found out those people were the same as me. Inside Au Chat Noir, I was quickly recognized, or at least suspected, as a visiting poet by the poets there. After some drinks we went down in the old basement for the readings. Many people read, and some of them were quite good. Five minutes gave me enough time to read four poems from my chapbook, *First Hours of a Rainy Day*, *Maximus Beast*, *All Healing Is Self-Healing* and *Where Earth Meets Sky*. My voice was strong and the poems were well received. Afterwards, there were more drinks upstairs in the bar, and some greetings and introductions, and I passed out some cards. One of the expatriate writers emailed me later while I was traveling elsewhere in Europe, and invited me to look him up when I returned to Paris. We met on a rainy Friday evening on Montmartre with a group of several women, including his friend, a feisty Italian lady who marched us around and showed us locations and told us histories of the brothels that had been there for over a century, and had been immortalized in art and literature. We also stopped before a storefront that our guide declared to have been the location of the original Chat Noir of the famous advertising posters. My friend showed me some local publications, including a big anthology to mark the 100th anniversary of Dada, and told me stories about the English poetry scene and its characters at that peculiar juncture in 21st century Paris. My recent studies, I had explained, were of the Jazz Age, and the "Lost Generation" in Paris some 90+ years before, and it made me happy to discover a thriving poetry scene there now, in my own time. I must be well involved in spoken word events back home in San Francisco, my friend declared, as he could tell by the confidence and experience I exuded when I read. No, I confessed, for many years my salaried work had me on the job so early in the morning that I had no involvement in night life and late readings in bars. My reading voice was a natural gift, and the experience gained in public performance over decades at celebrations, commemorations, concerts, and daytime readings and radio appearances, but the reading at Au Chat Noir had been so enjoyable that I resolved to find more opportunities to recite poetry, in San Francisco, in other lands and cities, and especially, I eagerly anticipated my next return, and sensibility, as a poet in Paris.

— D. A. Wilson

DECEMBER ALMANAC

- 12/01 1918 Transylvania united with the Kingdom of Romania.
 12/06 1933 U.S. judge John M. Woolsey ruled James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* is not obscene.
 12/13 1928 George Gershwin's *An American in Paris* was first performed in Carnegie Hall, NY.
 2016 FULL COLD MOON
 12/14 1902 Commercial Pacific Cable Company laid the first Pacific telegraph cable, from San Francisco to Honolulu.
 12/21 2016 WINTER SOLSTICE/NORTH EARTH
 12/23 1986 *Voyager* became the first aircraft to fly non-stop around the world without aerial or ground refueling.
 2002 Walter S. Roessler died in Oakland, at 98.
 12/24 1910 Fritz Reuter Leiber, Jr. born in Chicago.
 12/25 1993 Elizabeth B. Wilson born, San Francisco.
 2003 Juliette Carstensen born in Vallejo, CA.
 2016 CHRISTMAS DAY
 12/27 1978 Spain became a democracy after 40 years of fascist dictatorship.
 12/28 2016 NEW MOON
 12/29 1916 *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce first published as a book.
 12/31 1976 D.A. Wilson heard Grateful Dead live for first time via radio @ Top of the Hill.
 2013 John O. Wilson died @ Top of the Hill, Martinez, California, age 75.
 2016 NEW YEAR'S EVE

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