

The Rainmakers: Beer Bottle Old Woman and Tin Can Old Man

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El Rio Debajo El Rio: The river beneath the river, by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Vol. 1, No. 4 March 31, 2008

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Wherever the land is dry and hard, you could be the water ...

or you could be the blade disking the earth open;

or you could be the *acequia*, the ditch that carries water from river to fields;

or you could be the just engineer mapping dams that must be taken down,

and those which would serve the venerable all, instead of only the very few;

or you could be the battered vessel for carrying water by hand;

or you could be the one who stores the water, protects it, blesses it or pours it;

or you could be the tired ground that receives it;

or you could be the scorched seed that drinks it;

or you could be the vine green-growing overland in all wild audacity ...

If there is an ancient secret to caring for and mending the significant lacerations to this ?Oh-my-dear-God-beautiful? earth we?ve been given, by soul?s light it might be just a tiny four-word prayer from Creator to humanity:

?Please, just start anywhere.?

The Vatican made a good start. In *L'Osservatore Romano*, a recent interview titled ?New Forms of Social Sin,? gives Archbishop Gianfranco Girotti?s remarks about ?ecological? sin, undergirding Pope Benedict XVI?s recent public expression of concern about global warming.

This statement via the Vatican may be evidence of the quickening of the very soul of one of the largest churches on planet Earth. It is a distinct move away from taking eons to notice or affirm scientific ecological facts that might aid humans. Instead, it joins in to exhort guardianship of the earth with an unprecedented timeliness of thought and action insofar as possible.

If this focus is sustained and elaborated by Vatican actions beyond simply changing its brick and mortar structures to save energy in heat and electricity, that potentially creates a breathtaking headline in history.

In a 'philosophorum' of prophets

Imagine that we have long had a world of science and *scientia* knowing without *sapientia*, wisdom of soul. Imagine a new day when we could have 'a science with soul' that would take from a mystical 'philosophorum,' a way of seeing, thinking and being that derives not from the rote nor the political, not from the merely utile nor expedient, not from the factual alone, but rinsed through the soul's sight.

Imagine it: The soul informed by science. Science informed in its uses by the soul.

Imagine we could tender to the world, a way of 'seeing underneath' by emphasizing over and over that the invisible beginnings of scarcity in earth's resources that then dwindle incrementally, are literally what promotes visible, murderous wars.

Imagine speaking about social science, bio-science and political science, all within the context of the soul's measures, with the soul as able actor and thinker. To speak at several cohesive levels at once, is to speak as prophet in the most visionary sense. Perhaps some think prophet too grand a word for we mere 'peoplings.' Yet, what is a prophet but a person who sees, and more so acts and speaks, about the incandescent life force immanent, or lost, in places where others merely pass by without seeing?

Imagine teaching the young that the care of all people and the making of peace in the world begins with the care of the things humans die without, and most especially will murder each other over: access to clean and adequate water, air and land; access to crops and medicines that come from the earth; an ecosystem that does not strip humans of habitat but instead nourishes and revives them, rests them and feeds them, and reminds them of a 'Source without source' daily, without having to be told, or without having to pay to be carried there to visit. One is already there. One is already Home.

Our works in non-paradise

In that sense, to preserve the earth's elements and life force, is sacred truth, not just a gaggle of dry words written down somewhere. Earth's elements influence us deeply at more than just physical sustenance levels. It is not by accident that the soul finds blocks of shattered glass a match for anything jagged in the psyche, and finds a grove of trees a restful place that calls peace forward in the psyche.

It is true. Some of us are called to launch out into the greater world and do big, noticeable, laudable endeavors in terms of caring for this earth. But, most of us are called to stand watch where we are, the watchers over our own peck of ground.

And there are literally millions of us who have been given care of small portions, so that when added up, we, the watchers over our tiny parcels, make up the majority of protectors of *all* life on the surface of the earth. We are tiny boned as individuals, and of huge muscular spiritual strength in numbers.

And the little-big actions that we can take, whatever they might be, in addition to those we already know about how to love this earth, are constantly teaching others, whoever bothers to see, whoever can see, that the Earth is our tender relative rather than some grab-bag to pry one more resource out of.

It seems odd, but it also seems a given that destruction is what so radicalizes many of us.

Often then, when a person, place or thing has been ruined or nearly so, paradoxically, something completely

unruined in ourselves surfaces, a mystical and mythical self. We often feel a strong call then, one we didn't hear/sense/feel before when we thought all was well or 'good enough' or when we were looking 'the other way.'

We may be driven now, to do, say, become any number of effective forces.

Two small stories for encouragement:

Beer Bottle Old Woman

In the oldest tales of the Eastern Europeans, North people, Latinos and Native Americans, mythic characters, both animals and people, are often called by their occupation or by their psychical characteristics. Thus protagonists are named Blue Corn Old Woman, or Black Badger Boy, or Red Weaver Young Girl, and so on.

So, first, a story about Beer Bottle Old Woman, which is what we came to call one of our aunts. One day they arrested my immigrant Aunt Kathé. She was standing in the middle of the highway amidst 18-wheelers blasting by. She was holding a brown bottle, a Drewrys beer bottle. She was so small, she hardly showed in the backseat of the sheriff's car.

My father, also an immigrant to America and normally terrified by any authority figure, said he'd try to follow the sheriff's instructions to keep my aunt in the house from now on, but he couldn't promise, because in the old country village, our aunt was one of the rainmakers.

Rainmakers have to do what they have to do.

That was Dad's explanation in Dad's heavily accented English. You could kind of read the lawman's thoughts on his face: These crazy immigrants. And away Sheriff Young Man roared in a sudden shower of gravel.

A rainmaker, for which there are many words in languages worldwide, is a person who, while tumult and hissing hoses are coming undone everywhere goes about quietly, often at the edge of the village, maintaining what some would call *temenos*, a place of calm, of healing. No matter what else.

Sometimes they are called peaceblood people, or holders of the world's birth cord. They hold the center while whatever else flies apart to be born or die. Sometimes they are called prayer makers, or exemplars of what a calm heart looks like. Sometimes they have no name.

By legend, rainmakers are unassuming people who make no large pronouncements about what they will do next. They are mostly a hidden species of humans, perhaps most analogous I say with a little levity but also seriousness -- to Tolkein's Hobbits. They are in love with the earth, protectors of it and of the human heart. Though you might see evidence of their work, you seldom see them working, in part because they, like the smithy elves of lore and the angels of scripture, often enough work at dawn or by the light of moon, times when most people are self-interested or else asleep.

They move in their works adjusting this, straightening that, transplanting this other, seeing what else is needed over here, doing most everything in small increments that can lead to changing outcomes for the better. Not always. But often.

After my aunt passed -- and I will tell you in a moment what she was doing out on the highway with her beer bottle -- I didn't see another rainmaker in the flesh for many years, not until I met Tin Can Old Man, who appeared out of nowhere at a roadside on an off-ramp exit from the interstate.

Tin Can Old Man

Tin Can Old Man was dragging a large battered red can that pictured on its side that Arabian fellow in his beautiful yellow nightgown (it seemed to me as a child) ; the logo for Hills Bros. coffee.

What was this old man with a beat-up coffee can doing in the midst of a withered, bare brown hill at the off ramp?

Rainmaking.

Amid the 50,000 cars, trucks and vans that pour over that off ramp daily, Tin Can Old Man limped over the hard ground pouring little drips of water on the dry earth. Pouring water, the ancient blessing to seal a troth.

His staff had a nail driven through the end. He patiently poked holes in the ground, then a bit of water from the can, then another hole, twisting his staff to break open the hard earth. Another bit of water. On and on, daybreak after daybreak, there he was dragging the red can of water, making holes in the hard packed dirt.

Then, one day, he was gone. I looked for him every day for a long time. Never again would I see him. And the land there at the off ramp was just as barren, just as brown and just as hard packed as before. I?m sure many in the queue of cars and trucks that bleated through there daily, thought: Crazy old man.

A year passed. In the following spring, up came long green swords from that barren land, waving in the Chinook winds, brazenly, as though to say, Ha! Thought this place was a goner did you?

And then, one morning days? later, overnight, came full flowers on those green pods and blades. Sure daisies would have been easy to grow, or something with camel-like endurance such as kudzu. But Tin Can Old Man had been planting there something delicate: lilies. Brilliant yellow lilies. Hundreds of them on that small slanting acre. Their petals winked millions of glints in the sunrise as though they?d been salted with gold dust.

In this cacophony of horns and tires, of fender benders at that crux of interstate and an 8-lane, divided road, in the midst of the turmoils and triumphs carried in every little metal car and truck that went by -- the lilies. Tin Can Old Man?s love writ huge.

My aunt? Beer Bottle Old Woman? Yes, her brown glass Drewrys beer bottle was filled not with alcohol, but with well water. She had seen that there were little green shoots growing through cracks of asphalt and tar in the middle of the highway that cut through our small town, population 600. Her job as rainmaker, as she saw it, was to help grow what was tender dear in the midst of flurry, hurry, and harried unrest. Wherever she found it.

Rainmakers have to do what they have to do.

We, too.

Truly, so may it be for thee

And so may it be for me

And so may it be for all of us.

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