

**Left Bank Society of Roanoke**  
**April 12, 2009**  
**Breathed Bridges Best, LLC ©**

It was the Pennsylvania Museum of Fine Arts that got me interested in the Seven Lively Arts. In the Spring of 2007 I traveled from Washington D.C. to Philadelphia to see ten paintings from the *Bridges Collection*. The exhibition: *Art in Chicago: Resisting Regionalism, Transforming Modernism* happened to have 7 paintings, each depicted one of the Seven Lively Arts: Sculpture, Painting, Drama, Music, Architecture, Literature, Dance. Salvador Dali painted the Seven Lively Arts in 1947. These Chicago surrealists hailed what Dalí called the Paranoiac-critical method of accessing the subconscious for greater artistic creativity in their work.

I have been fascinated with the Arts ever since seeing these 7 paintings. I have drawn us together tonight to look at our common theme; that of creativity and the historic Left Bank of Paris.

\*\*\*\*\*

“From the valleys of the Indus and the Nile to the Orkney Isles, the coasts of Brittany and the jungles of Yucatan, time offers its own verdict on man’s [and women’s] creations...[they] bear witness to [humanity’s] effort to outlive his life and make something that would endure forever...But with their message comes the mystery of their creation, reminding us that men never know the powers of what they have created.”

<sup>1</sup> It is this mystery of creation that draws us here tonight. Each of the Seven Lively Arts is endowed with its share of creativity. The men and women who comprise each discipline are creative and this is the tie that binds us together, the common denominator of creativity.

Our desire to bare our souls manifests itself in the creative impulse which is as old as prehistoric mankind. Early man created hieroglyphics on the walls of their cave dwellings depicting their form of art. Stonehenge dates back to 2000 B.C. and is “one of the most impressive, now become one of the earliest works of European architecture, the work of ‘mere barbarians,’ people who had neither metal nor writing....revealed man’s irrepressible creative powers everywhere and democratized the history of *man the creator*.”<sup>2</sup>

Stonehenge was oriented to the motions of the sun and the moon with an astronomical precision that leads archaeologists to agree that it was indeed some kind of observatory of the heavens. This creative wonder was a “symptom of man’s yearning for immortality.”<sup>3</sup> It was a calculated effort to create a compass to rescue himself from the ravages of time. To the great pyramids in Egypt -- to the pyramids in Central America -- man has had the impulse to create in order that his art might immortally out live his mortal soul.

It was Hemingway who understood the brain in a way that prevented the critical apparatus from interfering with the creative flow. “During [a] three-month vacation, he was at the Taube sixty days and wrote thirty-three letters...Because he seldom wrote

letters when his fiction was going well, it appears that the three months were a dry spell...but it was going to extend another three months, the longest hiatus since he returned from the war...He tried, but for the first time the stories simply were not there, and it scared him.”<sup>4</sup> It scares us all to think that the creative flow might some day be shut of like a water fountain.

Where does the human being acquire this creative flow and how do we nurture it in our creative lives? I personally believe the creative nexus comes from a divine source and that all creative impulses are a gift from God. God is the ultimate Creator of our world and the universe. I also believe that the creative juices are stimulated through collegiality. The pooling of ideas amongst creative souls draws us closer together as we seek to convey our deepest yearnings to express ourselves.

Listen to this creative poem from Lord George Gordon Byron:

‘Tis to create, and in creating live  
A being more intense, that we endow  
With form our fancy, gaining as we give  
The life we image, even as I do now.  
What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou  
Soul of my thought! With whom I traverse earth,  
Invisible but gazing, as I glow  
Mix’d with thy spirit, blending with thy birth,  
And feeling still with thee in my crush’d feeling’s dearth.<sup>5</sup>

In order to comprehend this poem we must first understand the creative mind of the poet. “The sign of the poet is that by passion he [she] enters into life more than other men. That is his [her] gift – the power to live...[Poets] have been singularly creatures of passion. They lived before they sang. Emotion is the condition of their existence; passion is the element of their being; and, moreover, the intensifying power of such a state of passion must also be remembered, for emotion of itself naturally heightens all the faculties, and genius burns the brighter in its own flames.”<sup>6</sup> All our disciplines in the Lively Arts encompass a passion which flames our soul’s.

Who are these unique creative individuals that are touched with fire? Psychologists have studied this phenomenon of creativity and have concluded that: “the highest rates of psychiatric abnormality were found in the poets (50 percent) and musicians (38 percent): and lower rates were found in painters (20 percent), sculptures (18 percent), and architects (17 percent).”<sup>7</sup> In comparison to the *mortal* population of the average man or woman, we are basically *touched* individuals or *aby-normal* in our genetic makeup.

You all have seen the movie *Young Frankenstein* with Gene Wilder. The mad scientist, Dr. Frankenstein, sends Egor out to get a brain for the monster. Late at night Egor goes to a lab and sneaks into it. He identifies the brains in jars and picks up a jar that says normal. He accidentally drops the jar and the brain explodes all over the floor. Then he looks up on the shelf and spies another brain, this one titled *aby-normal*.

Egor brings the brain back to Dr. Frankenstein and this is the brain that is put into the monster. When the monster wakes up he goes psychotic. Dr. Frankenstein looks over to Egor and asks what brain he gave to him. Egor responds, "Aby something, aby-normal." Dr. Frankenstein goes crazy and tries to strangle Egor.

We creative types are all aby-normal, especially artists types; there is no norm to which we have to conform as human beings. It is our abnormal minds that create the art which we all have such a passion to create. Psychologists believe, "The boldness of temperament needed for original work is stressed in a different sort of way...That which is creative must create itself...High energy levels and boldness are clearly essential to virtually all creative endeavors."<sup>8</sup> They also found that "In order for far-flung or chaotic thoughts to be transformed into works of art, original and meaningful connections must be made."<sup>9</sup> Through divine inspiration and the exchange of collegial ideas artists create and make these meaningful connections, then they produce their art.

What is unimaginable to the common man -- that does not see a cosmic sense of grandiosity -- is what connects us to our artistic disciplines. Both emotional and intellectual leaps of acute observational powers enable the artist to see things or write things or dance things or build things or to compose things or to sculpt things or to act things or to paint things otherwise unseen by the common man. This is what makes us artists and what binds us together as creative souls.

\*\*\*\*\*

Collegiality is a key element in creativity. Many of our arts call for isolation and many of us are lone wolves. However, no man is an island to himself. Others of us are surrounded by people in our art disciplines all day and night. Consequently, they do not need any more collegiality, but escape from people. I would argue that either camp is in need of occasional creative collegiality, case in point the Left Bank of Paris is precedence for my thoughts.

"Certain neighborhoods of the Left Bank could serve as a virtual extension of [the Frenchmen's] living room...privileged places were a few streets in Montparnasse, particularly a group of cafes on the boulevard of that name....Saint-Germain-Pres, with its density of bookstores and publishing houses, galleries and outdoor cafes."<sup>10</sup> The 1920's up until the 1950s, this place was known as the Left Bank of the Siene River. It was a lively place full of artists of all types that found solace for their work and their creative ideas.

It was a gay time along Montparnesse. "Street vendors sold lemonade, ice cream and fresh strawberries to the young men from Harvard in their straw hats and white flannel trousers. Ernest [Hemingway] and Hadley [his wife] were part of it, drinking sometimes at the Dome, sometimes at the Dingo, going to parties and laughing together down the street."<sup>11</sup> "In front of the Dome a casual observer would have seen a smooth-faced, young American in a dark suit, muffled against the cold and hair askew, sipping his hot rum punch by the charcoal fire and watching everything and everyone with quick, dark eyes."<sup>12</sup>

“Less than two blocks from Hemingway’s table, what was left of Charles Baudelaire and Guy de Maupassant lay beneath stone memorials in the Montparnesse cemetery. A five-minute walk down Boulevard Raspail, Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas were planning their Christmas meal. Close by Ezra Pound was reading through a bit of manuscript left him by his young friend with exhausted nerves, Tom Eliot, on his way to a rest cure in Lausanne....Less than two blocks from the Hemingway’s hotel, James Joyce was dressing to attend a party at Sylvia Beach’s bookstore, *Shakespeare and Company*, where he would celebrate the final revisions to his manuscript *Ulysses*.”<sup>13</sup>

None of these literary giants knew that Ernest Hemingway was in town. However, before the year ended they would know him well. “A conjunction of literary influences was about to take place which would forever change the topography of American literature.”<sup>14</sup> Hemingway’s reach was beyond America for he was soon to become a leading world literary figure.

In the early 1920s, Hemingway’s time period, there was much hustle and bustle along the boulevards of the Left Bank. “One’s creative life, one’s friendships and affections, were played out on a stage that would soon have the whole world as an audience.”<sup>15</sup> Montparnesse was the preferred haunt of painters and poets, and Picasso was one of the many painters who found refuge there. The creative elite of the first decades of the century found entertainment and collegiality with friends at Montparnesse.

Painters and writers had much in common. It was said of Hemingway that “Once he knew his purpose, all that mattered was telling the story right; if the light needed to fade or the image to shift to make his point, then, like the painter, he changed what he knew and what he heard of reality to meet art’s necessity. He came to understand what Ezra [Pound] told him: fiction and painting were both based on selection.”<sup>16</sup>

Pound was an American expatriate poet, critic and intellectual who was a major figure of the Modernist movement in the first half of the 20th century. He is generally considered the poet most responsible for defining and promoting a Modernist aesthetic in poetry. Gertrude Stein was an American writer who spent most of her life in France, and who became a catalyst in the development of modern art and literature. Throughout her lifetime, Stein cultivated significant tertiary relationships with well-known members of the *avant garde* artistic and literary world.

The Americans of Montparnesse were already something of a legend by 1925. Ernest Hemingway was one of these important literary success stories. The Left Bank of the young American girls dancing the shimmy was also the Left Bank of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. “There were always much nicer-looking people that I did not know that in the evening with the lights just coming on, were hurrying to some place to drink together, to eat together and then to make love,” said one Left Bank writer.<sup>17</sup>

Louis Aragon was a poet and an apologist for Communism. Not far from the Rue du Chateau was the large artist’s studio of Aragon, hugging the Boulevard du Montparnesse.

He was an eccentric character to the dimensions of decorating “the toilet at 54, Rue du Chateau.”<sup>18</sup> Aragon in this period was the key player between Communist and non-Communist intellectuals. At the end of the 1920s the Surrealists en bloc joined the French Communist Party.

In the 1920s, France was the center of the literary and artistic world, and Paris was the center of that center. It attracted the best of the current generation from distant places and neighboring nations. Paris was the training ground for the best of the next generation of artists as well. “The most formal literary institution of all was located in the heart of the Left Bank: the *Academie Francaise*, with its ceremonial meetings of honored writers, professors, scientists.”<sup>19</sup> The Academie was a part of the elite circles in France. It was a click of the elite artists that made up the patrons of the Left Bank.

Éditions Gallimard was and is one of the leading French publishers of books. It was founded in 1911 in Paris by Gaston Gallimard. It was and is described as having ‘the best backlist in the world’. “Gallimard’s pre-World War II catalogue could almost be taken for a bibliography of contemporary literature, with only a few names missing.”<sup>20</sup> Many of the authors and poets bowed and scraped to get an opportunity to present their works to this esteemed literary publishing house.

On the eve of World War II the cafes of the Left Bank were summed up in this statement: “One couldn’t write thirty lines in a newspaper in Paris, paint a painting, or hold strong political opinions...without devoting at least one evening a week to this café-restaurant [Lipp]...Lipp is certainly one of the places, the only one perhaps, where for the price of a draft beer one can have a faithful and complete summing-up of a political or intellectual day in France.”<sup>21</sup> By the 1930s “it was a quiet place where Hemingway could sit with a café crème and his writing pad without risking interruption.”<sup>22</sup> One could learn Bohemian life at this and other cafes.

The Left Bank supported artist of all kinds. However, as tumultuous times were beginning to rear their ugly head’s it was also a place for intellectuals and politicians. Lenin and Trotsky, before the Russian Revolution, were also frequent visitors of the Left Bank cafes.

In 1933 Andre Gide was another player on the Left Bank stage and a political animal. He was probably the best-known representative of French letters at home or abroad. He was a homosexual and an early advocate of a very literary homosexuality. He also had a great love for Soviet Communism. Gide was a part of a group of writers that denounced Hitlerism. He supported “Communist individualism”<sup>23</sup> which seemed to be a contradiction in terms.

With the coming of war political party affiliations developed next on the Left Bank. Some were communist, some fascists, some socialists and some surrealists. The artist’s common bond was creativity, but what separated them was their party affiliations as world politics was making a monumental shift away from democracy. The Radical

Socialists movement was committed to “defend and develop democratic freedoms, and to guarantee peace for humanity.”<sup>24</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

Politics of the Left Bank were steaming up when in January 1933 Hitler came to power and Nazi repression was beginning to be felt on the Left Bank. The Popular Front government in France was supported by the Communists and they were against Fascism in France. “At few times in the history of government has the role of intellect been so decisive.”<sup>25</sup>

There was now a fusion of the intellect and politics that was unavoidable on the Left Bank. Had the Fascists conquered the streets of the Left Bank? “*The Committee of Vigilance of the Anti-Fascists* was a vehicle for a whole generation of writers, journalists, teachers, poets, and painters to take part, or feel as if they were taking part, in a movement directed against immediate danger.”<sup>26</sup>

Stalin had many disappear at the hand’s of his police. To the east, Nazi Germany was on the move. In 1938 Hitler defied the *Versailles* treaty by introducing military conscription into Germany. As Italy completed its occupation of Ethiopia, Mussolini entered into a secret alliance with Germany, which had already signed such a pact with Japan. Germany then began the annexation of its neighbors.

In March of 1938 Austria fell to the Germans. By October 1, the Germans began to occupy Czechoslovak territory. On September 1, 1939, the Germans marched into Poland. By September 3 France and the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. By June 1940 the Germans occupied Paris. With the declaration of war the true exodus from the Left Bank began.

In the beginning, intellectuals seemed ready to believe that resistance to war and resistance to Fascism were one and the same. “The horrors of World War I could still be remembered, while Fascism was a distant threat. With the coming to power of Hitler, more than one French group split down the middle.”<sup>27</sup> By August of 1939 Stalin agreed to a pact of nonaggression with Hitler. With that agreement, the alliance of communism and Nazis Fascism was complete.

In early February 1940 “Sartre was thirty-two when [the war] began. Drafted, he served in a grim outpost on the dormant eastern front.”<sup>28</sup> Malraux finally joined the active resistance. Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus were central figures of the intellectual Left Bank. Sartre was a French existentialist philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic. He was one of the leading figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century French philosophy.

Camus was an Algerian-born French author, philosopher, and journalist who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1957. He is often associated with existentialism, but Camus refused this label. On the other hand, as he wrote in his essay *The Rebel*, his whole life was devoted to opposing the philosophy of nihilism while still delving deeply into individual freedom.

It was said that there were two Frances in the years of German occupation. “German occupation authorities, responsibility for control of French cultural production – books and periodicals, theater and music and the other arts – belonged to the Propaganda Department, which reported to the German military command.”<sup>29</sup> There were both Parisians that resisted German occupation and those that collaborated. “German officers revealed the true intentions of the Nazis: to destroy France. ‘Not only its power: its soul as well.’”<sup>30</sup> For many Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, survival meant to flee the Left Bank. This was true for Jews and for known Communists or active left-wingers.

\*\*\*\*\*

No persons of sound mind could have expected prewar conditions to return to the Left Bank at the conclusion of World War II. “Young men, young women, whose only credentials for admission into the society of letters [of the Left Bank] were their records of courage and commitment.”<sup>31</sup> The liberation of France came at the cost of millions of lives around the world. “Adrienne Monnier cries, ‘It’s Hemingway!’ [Sylvia Beach] rushes downstairs. In battle dress, grimy and bloody...Hemingway picks her up and swings her around, kissing her as onlookers cheer. At the request of the two booksellers, Hemingway orders his company out of the jeeps and up to the roofs to clear out the snipers, and that puts an end to the firing on the street. Hemingway and his men come down again and take their leave, ‘to liberate the cellar at the Ritz,’ as he tells her.”<sup>32</sup> The Left Bank and Paris were now liberated, but the atmosphere would never be the same as it was before the war.

The next historical phase to affect the Left Bank was the Cold War era. “The cold war has been dated as starting...from the day and the hour in March 1947 when Harry S. Truman asked Congress for military and economic aid for Greece and Turkey, this at a time when a Communist-inspired insurrection in Greece threatened to bring one or both countries into the Soviet orbit.”<sup>33</sup>

In the 1950s, “as the present story comes to an end, the Left Bank was taking a long vacation from politics. One had been stung enough. ‘How can we forget the successive submissions and resignations, the explosive ruptures, the excommunications, the imprisonments, the suicides?’ declared Alain Robbe-Grillet in 1957, when he was thirty-five years old and fully resolved as a writer not to repeat the errors of previous generations.”<sup>34</sup> The Cold War brought an end to the historic Left Bank, it would never be the same again.

\*\*\*\*\*

The creative soul has always been admired in cultures around the world. Their inspiration and creativity was located in the nexus of God and collegiality. Both of these forces help to produce a fine artist no matter which of the Seven Lively Arts the artist is involved. “The great imaginative artists have always sailed ‘in the wind’s eye,’ and brought back with them words or sounds or images to ‘counterbalance human woes.’ That they themselves were subject to more than their fair share of these woes deserves our appreciation, understanding, and very careful thought.”<sup>35</sup>

In relation to the painter: “Art [is] a product of new consciousness that has to be expressed in a visual language commensurate with a modern world. Form and content resulted from the artist’s emotional reaction; this could encompass a wide-range of subjects, including the transformation of one’s environment or the interpretation of the artist’s inner landscape.”<sup>36</sup> Which ever form of the Seven Lively Arts that you are representing here tonight it is believed that “Art is intimate self-expression that arises from inner consciousness and shows communion between the individual and his or her subject.”<sup>37</sup> “Art as a means to assert individuality and reflect the artist’s soul.”<sup>38</sup> I believe that both divine spirituality and collegiality are central to the gift we all share in common, creativity.

It has been said that “Organization is the death of art”<sup>39</sup> and that “Rules always deaden spontaneous creation...Art becomes ‘academic’ when it submits to formula – when the individual spirit of the artist dies.”<sup>40</sup> It is with these closing remarks that I would like to open the floor to discussion of our new Society – The Left Bank Society of Roanoke.

## Endnotes:

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Creators* (New York: Random House, 1992) 74.
  - <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
  - <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
  - <sup>4</sup> Michael Reynolds, *Hemingway The Paris Years* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989) 267.
  - <sup>5</sup> Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched With Fire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 124.
  - <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.
  - <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
  - <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.
  - <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.
  - <sup>10</sup> Herbert R. Lottman, *The Left Bank* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) 7.
  - <sup>11</sup> Michael Reynolds, *Hemingway The Paris Years* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989) 204.
  - <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
  - <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
  - <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
  - <sup>15</sup> Lottman, *The Left Bank*, 7.
  - <sup>16</sup> Reynolds, *Hemingway The Paris Years*, 112.
  - <sup>17</sup> Lottman, *The Left Bank*, 11.
  - <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.
  - <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
  - <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.
  - <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.
  - <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.
  - <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.
  - <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
  - <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
  - <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
  - <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.
  - <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.
  - <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.
  - <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.
  - <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.
  - <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.
  - <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 264.
  - <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 288.
  - <sup>35</sup> Jamison, *Touched With Fire*, 260.
  - <sup>36</sup> Robert Cozzolino, *Art In Chicago* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 2007) 15.
  - <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
  - <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
  - <sup>39</sup> Lottman, *The Left Bank*, 85.
  - <sup>40</sup> Robert Cozzolino, *Art In Chicago*, 16.

## Bibliography:

- 
- Boorstin, Daniel J. *The Creators*. New York: Random House, 1992.
- Cozzolino, Robert. *Art In Chicago*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 2007.
- Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched With Fire*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.
- Lottman, Herbert R. *The Left Bank*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

---

Reynolds, Michael. *Hemingway The Paris Years*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989.

Reynolds, Michael. *Hemingway The 1930s*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.