

Seeing Dick

1970, I saw you for the last time
eight years
before you died.

You'd come for dinner
at the big Berkeley house
on Piedmont that I shared
with a bunch of radical lefties.

You were down from Mendocino
to buy jute for your wife's
macrame. The shop owner told you
how talented she was.
I was jealous. I was weaving
for an MA in Design. You never looked
at my work. By then you'd
hooked up with Jim Jones.

I was packing to move north
to Canada to join the man
I loved. He'd fled the violence
that was America.
I was worried he wouldn't wait for me.
You said, *If he really loves you
he'll wait.*

I was angry knowing
you were right
and I was right.

Jonestown's Thirtieth Anniversary, November 18, 2008

Days before the thirtieth anniversary, I turn on the CBC, half listen to the morning news, quarter an orange, pour cereal into a bowl, then stop, riveted – a stash of letters in an old attache case forgotten in a Pasadena garage, letters from a young couple and their kids sent from Guyana to parents in California, how the couple, Jews, red diaper babies, had joined Jim Jones, become his closest aides. How the marriage broke down, the husband, fed up with Jones' control and paranoia, left Jonestown, then returned for his kids. But Jones had his food drugged, left him in semi-stupor. His wife was one of those who prepared the final poison.

prose

In one breath I'm shanghai-ed
into the story, yours, Dick, as well as theirs,
hostage to you and Jim Jones. In this darker world,
like a ravenous beast, against sense and better judgement,
I read whatever I can find – grow used to
a sickness in my gut.

The question like bile
rising in my throat:

How could you, Dick,
how could you be
so stupid?

University, the Year I Met You

Went to University of Rochester where I majored in English and comparative literature. Graduated with highest honours. Went to Europe on a travel scholarship.

– Dick Tropp

) pros

Walking back from class those Lake Ontario
winters, quadrangle trees bare, paths icy
dry grass rimed with blackened snow, wind
sharp as a whip raking my bare legs my
naked feet in their scabby sneakers no socks –
the stupidity of fashion tottering back
to the dorm on frozen limbs – to my lunch
of no food: a few lettuce leaves no dressing three cups
of rancid coffee no sugar no cream.
Training myself to live
outside my skin.

Archetypes

When the illustrious N.O. Brown, philosopher
of the “polymorphous perversity of the imagination”,

joined Rochester's faculty, the brightest or those who hoped
they were the brightest, enrolled in his “Archetypes”.

The rest of us audited. You were a star, Dick.
I went once, understood nothing

but I took Brown's course Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,
watched archetypes dance in through mythology's wide gates.

Three gifts Brown gave me. One, an ear and a fluency.
Ovid's Latin ripened me for Italian. When I landed in Florence,

its fruity vowels poured from my mouth. Second, his strategy:
scrap footnotes and citations, go for wings and passage.

Third, to trust my impulse without inkling where I'd wind up.
Ovid's stories were Parmigiano and fresh pears, blood oranges

both sweet and sharp. Better than manna.

Looking for Dick

I started out in the Bedford-Stuyvesant, grandson of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Lower middle class upbringing in suburbs on Long Island..., Deep interest in music, and studied cello from age nine.

) prose

– Dick Tropp

Me now, twice thirty, trying to imagine myself
into your skin: your awkward walk canted
a bit forward, your feet paddling wide, never quite

staying under you. In Rochester, you were graduating,
me shy and uncertain, two classes below. We were
the city kids, the New York kids, the Jewish kids. They were
the upstate kids, not Jewish. *Hayseeds*, we thought.

At night we wandered the vast cemeteries surrounding
the campus, went to foreign films and contemporary dance, played
Blue Grass and Bob Dylan. They joined fraternities, dressed
in togas, cheered football heroes. We hung out on the left side
of the lunch room where they never went.

Everyone drank too much beer.
But I didn't really know you.

Paris Adventure

Winter break, I take the train, Florence
to Paris, you on scholarship there, me
on a junior year in Italy. I call when I get there.
You leave me this note:

To Mlle. D. Field:

Dotzie (what everyone called me then but you
got the spelling wrong) –

*I stopped by this afternoon wondering if you would like,
perhaps, to go out tonight to a Paris rock & roll cave.
I have been ill all week with minor food poisoning – but
Im better now. If you would like to go, or in any case,
call me up at Fondation this evening after 7:00.
If we go, we shouldn't arrive before 10:00,
and should be prepared to stay until wee hours.
Since the metro doesn't run after 1:00 A.M.,
I would be forced to stay out until 5:30.
If you'd like to go, be prepared for a hard day's night.
Around 3:00 A.M. We could go over to Les Halles
for soupe de l'oignon. If not tonite then maybe
we could arrange another time – but Friday
is best night for this sort of adventure.*

Dick

We didn't go, I don't know why.

Do you remember our Christmas jaunt to Chartres, the glint
of bright sun through rainbows of coloured glass, how we climbed
the tower's worn stone steps, emerged to gyres of thick snow
against black clouds, climbed down to a sky blue

as when we started,
became friends?

*

8 13
Fed up with Paris, you move south to Florence.
We go out for pasta and fried squid, avoid the folds
of hairy tripe in glass cases in restaurant doorways,

eat plates of *uccellini*, songbirds fried crisp, chew them up
bones and all. I remember the crunch
of tiny bodies.

Friends, just friends. One day in San Gimignano
we watch crows swirl over a vista of yellowed grass.
Me: *A landscape is a landscape*

but when the crows fly, it's music. You, still a cellist,
look surprised – that I had it in me?
Me, touched by your approval.

Fondue

Remember that night in Florence,
Vito's apartment where he lets you stay.
One night I promise to make you
a cheese fondue, heat wine, grate gruyere,
stir it in. Instead of melting into creamy sauce,
the cheese congeals, one rubbery mass
in a milky sea. After that, if a fondue failed
I'd say: *It Tropped*.

Fondues end with the 60s
and I lose you again.

Siren Song

Christmas break two winters after Italy, we walk
from the Cloisters all the way down to the Village.

You're visiting from California, your own manifest
destiny, as far west as you could go without falling

into the sea, its misty grey fog both veil and come-on.
You've sloughed the strictures of the eastern suburbs, sing

a song of unfettered hills and wild times. Listening to you,
my Daedalus, my artificer of the unimaginable, I feel again

the pull of that far coast. Eight months later I'm there.

*Back to Berkeley to study classical Indian music with Ali Akbar Khan...
Very unhappy... ran around with all sorts of losers. Couldn't get a handle
on my life.*

– Dick Tropp

) prose

New York again, summer break, we buy huge loaves of pumpernickel
on the Lower East Side, ride the ferris wheel at the Festival of San Antonio.
Me, the acolyte, you, my beacon.

By then I'm at UC Berkeley, studying esoteric thread ways:
twining, card weaving, knotless netting,
my fingers finally remembering what to do.
When the campus goes on strike, I starve.

Separate trajectories. You're dropping out. Instead of a PhD
they give you an MA and send you packing. *A relief*, you say,
from the hallowed halls of boredom.

March 20, 1968: Day after the Feast of San Giuseppe

You arrive at my door
with a blind-folded friend.

A trust exercise, you say.
What did I know
of trust?

I feed you both, tea and San Giuseppe cream puffs,
my observance of Sicily's yearly feast

when all who are hungry
come and eat.

*

Decades later I take my turn at trust.
William Head penitentiary. A circle of lifers
and us outside do-gooders. We practice falling

into each others' arms – big guys
big tattooed arms. Me, tense, wanting,
not wanting.

I fall back and am caught.
Raised and rocked. Three times.
Lost in their arms.

Arms that had taken life
holding it.

Harm Reduction

*I equated academic life with death. I had been experimenting with
psychedelic drugs, had drifted in the "hip" culture of Berkeley, and my
outlook became that of a confused radical Utopian.*

– Dick Tropp

) prose

At university white college kids move drugs
out of the labs and ghettos into the dorms.
Grass mescaline magic mushrooms LSD.

My friend Pete stays straight, wanders the campus
with stoned friends to keep them
from falling out of trees. Harm reduction.

In Berkeley, your commune throws a party
at your hippie house on Woolsey. My friend Katherine tells me
how she hung around drank some punch walked back home

lay awake fearful queasy uneasy sulphurous
faces morphing melting walls clocks sagging
Dali-esque nightmare stretching hoursandhoursandhoursandhours

Experience rank as fresh pig shit,
No way to defend you.

Talk to Me of Mendocino

I made a spur of the moment decision to move to Mendocino country and mine jade with a friend of a friend. My girlfriend and I settled in Redwood Valley in a cabin in late 1969. The jade business lasted two months.

– Dick Tropp

) prose

July 1968 I drive up to Mendocino with my older brother David – I called him “the Bro”, friends called him “Jade” – and his wife Susan. We’re off to the mine: the Bro with his Harvard MBA and his take charge attitude, the business brains of the operation, Susan with her strawberry hair, southern languor, an Isadora scarf round her neck, and me, along for the ride.

Route 101 north: Ukiah to Willits, east on route 162 through back-lit hills sparse with golden grass against a cerulean sky, how the land widens then curves back into itself high above a curly turquoise thread, the Eel River. Molten jade, I think –

then into Covelo and the jade camp, a ramshackle kitchen under a grove of live oaks. Open to heaven. Light through the oaks dapples the earth. A symphony of tan and umber cut through by a rock-strewn creek. I skinny dip in the tingle-shock of icy water.

Unknown Mendocino. The Bro and Susan soon move to Ukiah, the nearest town, “haiku” spelled backwards -- though there’s no haiku, and not much else.

You, Dick, kicked out of your PhD, follow with your wife, work for the Bro shaping and polishing jade. I see you there once when my boyfriend and I drive up for my only mescaline high, a gentle half-cap, Elysian fields, wildflowers floated with butterflies.

Before long the jade business fails, the Bro and Susan move to a tiny town tucked into the Sierras, then to Vermont. You stay on looking for land to farm, hear about a radical preacher with his rainbow family in next door Redwood Valley, go to a service

and you’re hooked. For years I take the blame: if I hadn’t introduced you to the Bro, you wouldn’t have met Jones, maybe you’d be alive today. Then it hits me – you didn’t need me to find Jones. If not Mendocino, then San Francisco.

I think back on that California jade – as if we’d woken in Tang dynasty China. Years later in Hong Kong, I buy a pendant, a milky jade persimmon, symbol of time’s passage, the shift from hard astringent inedible to soft sweet compassion. We should be so lucky. I still wear it on a cord round my neck.

do layout
for dotter
to review +
possibly
"re-jig"

Hey, Dick, that friend of a friend was me...

I was torn between several poles: intellectual, social conscience (...civil rights demonstrations and marches, revolutionary ideas), transcendence (the urge to overcome, to become "enlightened"). Also hedonistic side of personality.... I look back ...as if to another world, a dead and dying world...

– Dick Tropp

)prose

But your words fit with the you I knew.
You were agitated and agitating, choosing
relevance over dead ends. But Dick, is that bombastic
bullshit how we talked? Reading your words
I get itchy.

And you lose me. As if you'd severed
all connection to your gut.

The Child Jim Jones

I was considered the trash of the neighbourhood.

– Jim Jones

That his mother, a tough one, worked full time,
that his father, gassed in WWI, wasn't up to much, that
he wandered the streets of Lynn, Indiana, face dirty,
diapers gone, bum stained with shit.

That he'd hang out with the Pentecostals
ape their lilt and harangue, preacher's hands
high over the congregation who sat rapt or fell
on the floor howling gibberish and he knew

he was the one who should be up there, the one
in the robes, all eyes on him, choir belting gospel

behind him. That he preached to the rabbits and chickens
in his family's rickety barn, lured kids from school,
covered old tables with sheets, lit candles, waved his arms,
practised incantations and bible readings till they'd do

whatever he told them. Knew it all by the time he was
fourteen. Integrated his first church, made
the town clergy furious – but the crowds

came. When things got hot, he turned Pied Piper, led
his congregation to the place safest from nuclear holocaust
in America: Redwood Valley, California.

Peoples Temple Was a Full-Time Job

Dad: I strongly feel that the community needs at least one and probably two days off a week, where they could go to the library, to a movie, spend time with their children... There is a law of diminishing returns.

– Dick Tropp

) proze

An old Indiana friend asked Jones, "Why the sunglasses? The bodyguards?" Jones grinned: "Max, when you reach the top, you've got to play the part."

2 paragraphs
of prose

Plus overtime. Lou, our old college friend, met the Peoples Temple bus when it rolled across the continent, stopped in Rochester. You talked his ear off, weren't much interested in anyone but yourself. I'm just reporting.

Friday evenings the Temple's re-jigged Greyhounds left San Francisco, rolled down highway 101, arrived LA at dawn. Jones preached and recruited. Sunday night back on the buses. Eight hours each way, Jones in his air-conditioned cubicle curled up with his mistress, his wife up front with the rest of you, slumped in reclining seats that didn't recline. The lucky ones below in the baggage compartments. Monday morning back working flat out

for Peoples Temple. Lou listened speechless while you rambled non-stop: how you were the darlings of San Francisco, Rosalind Carter and Harvey Milk, black and white together, the Peoples Temple gospel choir, Jones' insatiable sexuality, blah blah blah. How you'd finally found your home.

Fleshing Things Out

I google your address in Westbury, Long Island:
aerial photo, the most normal of middle class ranchers,
detached house on a neat green lawn, full of
super-achiever kids. Were there *bubbes* and *zaydes*,
aunts and cousins? Were your parents
anti-McCarthy commie-pinkos or did they
toe the line just trying to get by? Were you raised
on the language of *tzedakah* and *chochmah*
or *svartzes* and *mamzers*?

Your father, a kind man, printer for a New York paper,
a reader of history, focuses on your success. You, the oldest,
comply, win scholarships, prizes, distinction. Until you move
west, drop out, dance shirtless to the Jefferson Airplane,
Grace Slick with her lank stringy hair.

Your mother, caring, maybe too yielding, longed to go
to college and couldn't, takes glee eating shrimp
with your brother in the garage because your father won't have it
in the house, pits you and your brother against each other,
sides first with one, then the other.

Your sister, Harriet, one of Jonestown's in-house lawyers,
in-house brat, voted by her high school Most Popular,
Most Likely to Succeed, Most Creative, close to Jones,
gutsy as hell, tells him: *Why would I want to fuck
a fat man with greasy dyed hair like you?*

Dick's wife Kathy Speaks #1

*I was unemployed, drifting. Looking for people with whom to buy land
and start a community. I met Jim Jones in the spring of 1970.*

– Dick Tropp

) prose

When your wife Kathy knocks on my door
exhausted from hours on I-5, I'm stunned.
She's old – so, what am I expecting, some hippy chick
looking like we did thirty years ago?

Kathy tells me: "Redwood Valley,
the first time we heard Jones preach,
Dick was hooked. Went back
the next morning. Again
in the evening."

"Me, I went to keep Dick company.
When I heard Janice Wilsey sing Buffy Ste. Marie
My Country 'Tis of My People We're Dying:

*And yet a few of the conquered have somehow survived...
The wounded, the losers, the robbed sing their tale...
The white nation fattens while others grow lean.*

Those words and Jones had me, too."

Listening to Jones

I listen to an early tape, 1972, Jim Jones
 in Redwood Valley, two years after you
 joined. He's high-brow, smooth, speedy, talking
 "epistemological", "para-psychological",
 he's tough, ungrammatical, how things will be
 blowed up, a nuclear holocaust, seven years from now,
 only seven. He's a lowly preacher, he says,
 but all his prophecies so far have come to pass.
 Slight southern drawl in his sarcasm, cutting everyone else
 down to size. He's relevant, on target, talking
 socialism and justice, before he wanders
 into lala-land as if he's lost interest
 in his sermon. Tells his audience,
Don't clap, takes up the time you need
to hear the truth. His truth, voice dipping
 then rising, cadence he's learned from itinerant
 preachers when he was a kid. He's experienced
 the extra-terrestrial, knows the very date
 the world will end, though he hopes

he's proven wrong. Before this, I'd only heard
 the late tapes, Jones addled and slow. I'd wondered why
 your Jonestown writings were so pretentious,
 freighted with too much meaning and
 bad grammar.

Now I hear your model, sense how much
 you longed to sing with the choir.

Kathy Speaks #2

As for that title "wife" oh yes, officially
but Jim had his ways of taking couples
apart. Allegiance was to Jim. Only
to Jim. You had to stay strong to hold up
under his assault.

Against Jim's rules, Dick named me
beneficiary of his teacher's pension,
told me as he left for Guyana. Makes me wonder

if he had inklings. I was supposed to follow
but my boss in the Peoples Temple print shop
couldn't do without me.

Took the state of California ten years
to track me down. I'd forgotten
the pension. Enough
to build my house.

Kathy reminds me you two came to dinner
at my communal house in Berkeley. I tell her
how proud you were of her art. She's moved,
surprised. I tell her how little I knew you.

She says:

He was a hard one to know.

Kathy Speaks #3

I ask your wife the questions that gnaw.
We're eating cheeseburgers in a funky cafe
where grease and gluten reign:

"Sure, we were infamous.
A bunch of lunatics and losers.

"But that's just half the story.
The other half was the joy
when work set us free.
We were high-octane, fuelled by
utopian vision and our belief
in our own strength. For years
I worked all day in the press room
putting out the *Peoples Forum*, 7am
to midnight, rising the next morning
to start again, proud of our tired bodies –
you think I'm exaggerating – drunk
on each other, talking deep into the night,
all of us misfits, ugly ducklings who'd finally
found our pond. Even Jim's paranoia helped
bind us. We knew we were up against
evil forces that hated our purity,
turning the brutality of the US of A
on its head. This was revolution
and we'd be the ones to make it happen.
Like Moses when he climbed the mountain
and looked across to the promised land.
We were the cogs that would turn the wheel,
the ones to teach the lions to lie with the lambs,
white and black building together."

Seeing Ourselves

Kathy tells me I was your best friend.

*How can that be? I ask her. What about all those
crazy radicals in your communal house on Woolsey?*

She reminds me how you called your dog
“Dogger”, your goat “Goater” in honour
of me “Dotter”. She says we were alike
in our “excellence and purity”, words that
don't feel like me. I'm surprised.

If she's right, I understand better
what a private man you were.

Puppetry Workshop, after the 30th Anniversary

Searching for you, I make a Dick puppet
 from newspaper and masking tape, large head,
 high forehead, glasses, body tilted forward, arms
 behind its back, string bean legs. Mouth doesn't open.
 Fingers can't hold a pen, play the cello.

Still it feels like you.

The teacher has us ask our puppets
 three questions.

What do you like?

The Dick puppet answers, voice
 reedy as a bamboo flute:

*Sleeping beside the open cabin window
 watching parakeets cross the sky*

What don't you like?

The puppet leans back a bit
 not liking to criticize:

*All these beans
 endless stickiness on my skin
 how fast the sun sinks
 behind the trees, no long summer evenings
 no seasons
 the fear that it's not going to work*

What do you want?

Deep breath:
Another chance.

Kelp Song

What I've cobbled together:
 That you, like most of the people we hung with, were Jewish
 but we never spoke of it and we didn't
 do anything Jewish because we just were Jewish –
 That you traded your cello for a sarod – though I never
 heard you play.
 That you got yourself kicked out of Berkeley
 dismissed from Fisk
 married a non-Jewish woman you didn't want your family
 to meet.
 That Jones described you (falsely) as the son
 of Holocaust survivors, presumably to up the pathos.
 That you were a loner, before the Temple and during.
 That you followed Jones' orders though
 you'd never followed orders before.
 I saw your aloneness but never the lost person
 you say you were. With me
 you were unadulterated energy, lit with plans.

Never at a loss for anything.

Except maybe that night at Half Moon Bay
 hot-poker sun sinking
 the rest of us involved with the fire, the hamburger patties,
 putting out ketchup, onions, you

separate
 far down the beach, barefoot, playing
 long sticky strands of seaweed *shofars*,
 kelp's wild song of
 lostness and search.

*

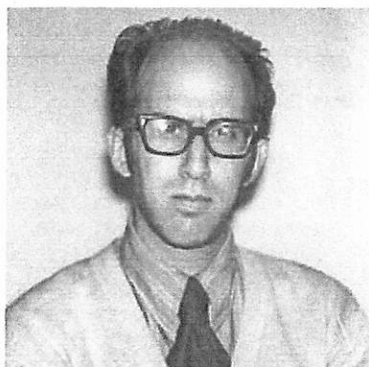
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Passport Picture

In Peoples Temple I have found the synthesis I was always looking for, personified in Jim Jones. At once a spiritual teacher, a down-to-earth human being, a person who represents to me the Nietzschean "overman".

— Dick Tropp

) prose



Your official photo on the Jonestown website, dark-rimmed glasses, V-neck sweater, dark tie. Your passport photo?

You with the trapped look of someone in one of those booths where you perch on a stool while the photographer aims his weapon: *Don't Smile, not allowed in US passport photos.* Slightly cross-eyed.

I feel your split state: dressed straight, passing as a studious nerd going down to Guyana to work as a teacher

vs.

the part that wants to shake your fist:
Take that, Uncle Sam, this is the last you'll see of me in your corrupt old USA, the last I'll see of you.

Who Are the People of Jonestown: Dick's script for a dramatic reading in four or five voices

"We are America's offspring,...factory workers, wage-slaves, people who toiled in the 'pastures of plenty' for starvation pay and perpetual misery; White, black, red and brown... We are America's 'niggers.' ..We are the people who never fit into the slots... We sensed something was wrong, terribly wrong. All the appearances of plenty, the supermarkets of consumer junk, the false symbols of affluence, a great festering ulcer that dug into the guts of our society, and our lives...It took Jim Jones to bring us together,...making us realize that we were hurting in common and hurting each other..."

"We are the people of Jonestown. Former church ministers, attorneys, nobodies, aimless college students, secretaries, pushers, prostitutes, labor organizers, social workers, Peace Corps veterans; jailbirds, used car salesman, machinists, designers, card-sharks, professors, ditch-diggers, railroaders, ex-CIA agents, artists, jet pilots, accountants, scientists, domestics, draftsmen, and actors: High School sports champions, exotic dancers, half-educated, miseducated, uneducated: health food nuts and junk-food addicts..."

"Reverend Jim Jones worked for 25 years in the United States, fought racists, faced assassination attempts, struggled against hordes of detractors...travelled millions of miles building, sacrificing all personal comforts... We have our remorse, our bitterness, our scars. But Jim Jones has always believed in lighting candles rather than cursing the darkness. And we are determined here to let our light shine."

prose

Your rhetoric reminds me of my father's – and mine
when I'm too full of myself: turgid, over-dramatic, repetitive –
and this is only half of what you wrote.

But I believe you believed it all,
or wanted to.

The Wrong Way: Dick's Words

A tape made sometime in 1978. Your sister Harriet speaks,
then you, Dick, echoing what she's just said:

"Hello. My name is Richard D. Tropp. All I want to say is that I've been a member of Peoples Temple for many years, and Jim Jones is a very compassionate man, but even though he's this kind of person and he is very committed to human ideals, I feel he is going about it in entirely the wrong way. Things are not moving fast enough....revolution comes out of the barrel of a gun... I got myself a bunch of people ... We're going to go out and get ourselves some of these bigwigs...Get some guns, get some bombs... We can get these places all blowed up... And I'm planning to take action very soon. Don't know where, but I cannot stay any longer a pacifist...We're just spinning our wheels... so I think we're going to have to kill some of these people, like, right from the president on down, I mean the senators, the congressmen... Create havoc, terrorism...."

Reading this, I feel sick. And it sounds
fishy. Jonestown was full of guns.
Jones didn't hesitate to have
those who opposed him
beaten drugged put in solitary.

Orchestrated, for some purpose
or to signal a shift? Your wife calls you

the gentlest of men. So what was brewing?

Then I remember how it ends –
Congressman Ryan and those
who just wanted to go home.

Their lifeless bodies on the tarmac.
And I feel even sicker.

Translation

From your mother's brisket
to enough starchy cassava
to choke a wild boar

from red-wing blackbirds to fruit bats like furry figs
hanging in Jonestown's trees, from California eucalyptus
to sweated skin under jungle sun.

Gave up music, became Jones'
public conduit, un-selfed yourself to write
others' voices, silenced your own strange

and lovely voice, disowned your history,
un-Jewed yourself, that love-hate baggage
we Jews shoulder, the tang of us-ness,

our chutzpah and our hubris, a war
against ego so that ego came to reside in
not having things or thinking things –

thinking being a holdover from the corrupt world
you'd come from. The ego of self-abnegation.

Disowned yourself in the service
of others, a severing beyond translation.

And you, Dick, Jonestown's Blind Tiresias

*To be brief, I have found a place here to serve, to be, to grow...A new center of gravity
has been established in my life...and, to my great relief and happiness, it is not me.*

) prose

-- Dick Tropp

On your self-made treadmill sitting
with the old black women head bent
taping their stories the Studs Terkel of Jonestown
running down home voices
onto a reel-to-reel tape machine
you with your over-sized earphones
to block the static around you
the joy of sitting with people you'd never have known
if not for Jones the women who slaved
so their kids might have a chance
the old black men who share-cropped in the South
but refused to stay
you Dick whose father plugged away so you could stand
in front of a university classroom spouting
literary theory you whose mother just wanted a chance
at those seats
teaching these every-color kids to read write think
by then Jones was disruptive irrelevant a mouthy thorn
only the old folks and the little ones believed
you now become Tiresias blinded by what you'd seen
Tiresias who was man then woman then man
old too soon though you were only 36
wanting so much it was a pain in your chest
wanting liberty and justice for all
like the words of the poisoned realm
you'd left behind.

Crossroads: Dick's Words

Late summer 1978 about three months
before the deaths:

"My name is (clears throat) Richard Tropp, and I want to share some reflections. First of all I would say ...to listen very, very carefully to the words of Jim Jones. Because here tonight, even at the hour of decision for a revolutionary suicide, you will find ...the *key* to the survival of humanity.

We are very weary people... it is very, very difficult, and now we see it as an imp – a practical impossibility to continue that life.

.... We have made collectively and individually a *decision* to terminate this work, we hope that it will serve as a symbol to the people of the world, that if you don't live a cooperative life, there is no life at all. Thank you."

prol

Letter to Jones: Dick's Words

...My feeling was very definite that we were being tested on our collective and individual determination to die. But this time, I felt that the kind of necessary collective testing didn't quite come across authentic...those voting against immediate 'revolutionary suicide' are subject to questioning that contains within it a not-so-subtle intimidation that they are either cowards or disloyal or too attached to living.) *proze*

—Dick Tropp, personal letter to “Dad” after a death rehearsal one summer night 1978

Your words, Dick, after an earlier White Night
with an innocuous potion.

You come through unapologetic, clear
and clean. No stumbling, no hesitation.
A truthfulness that could get you
in trouble.

“Too attached to living”, you say, but
isn't that our deepest lesson – to tune to life's
scorching tenderness –
a grandmother's bent and blue-veined hands,
the tremor in a friend's voice speaking
unspeakable truths,
an alder grove gone red
with January sap above a ribbon river
in a pebbled flood plane...

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Stockholm Syndrome

So please, don't be deterred by what you've seen in just the sermonizing side. I am indeed a live wire...I'll be a friend to the friendless. If you want a home, you've got a home. Anybody here that will try at all has got a home...) p. 200

– Jim Jones

Now I am in a struggle that consumes my time and energy.) p. 200

– Dick Tropp

By 1978, you'd been with Jones eight years,
endured a series of loyalty tests:
Would you turn over your savings to "Father"
and the Temple? Write a confession
owning up to your flawed class consciousness?

You did,
created a model the rest had to follow.

Would you work yourself till your eyes bugged out
and your clothes hung on your limbs?
You tried.

You proved yourself, Dick. Conflicted
maybe, but loyal
to the end.

But who am I to question you. I was my father's favourite,
his apologist, his most loyal defender.