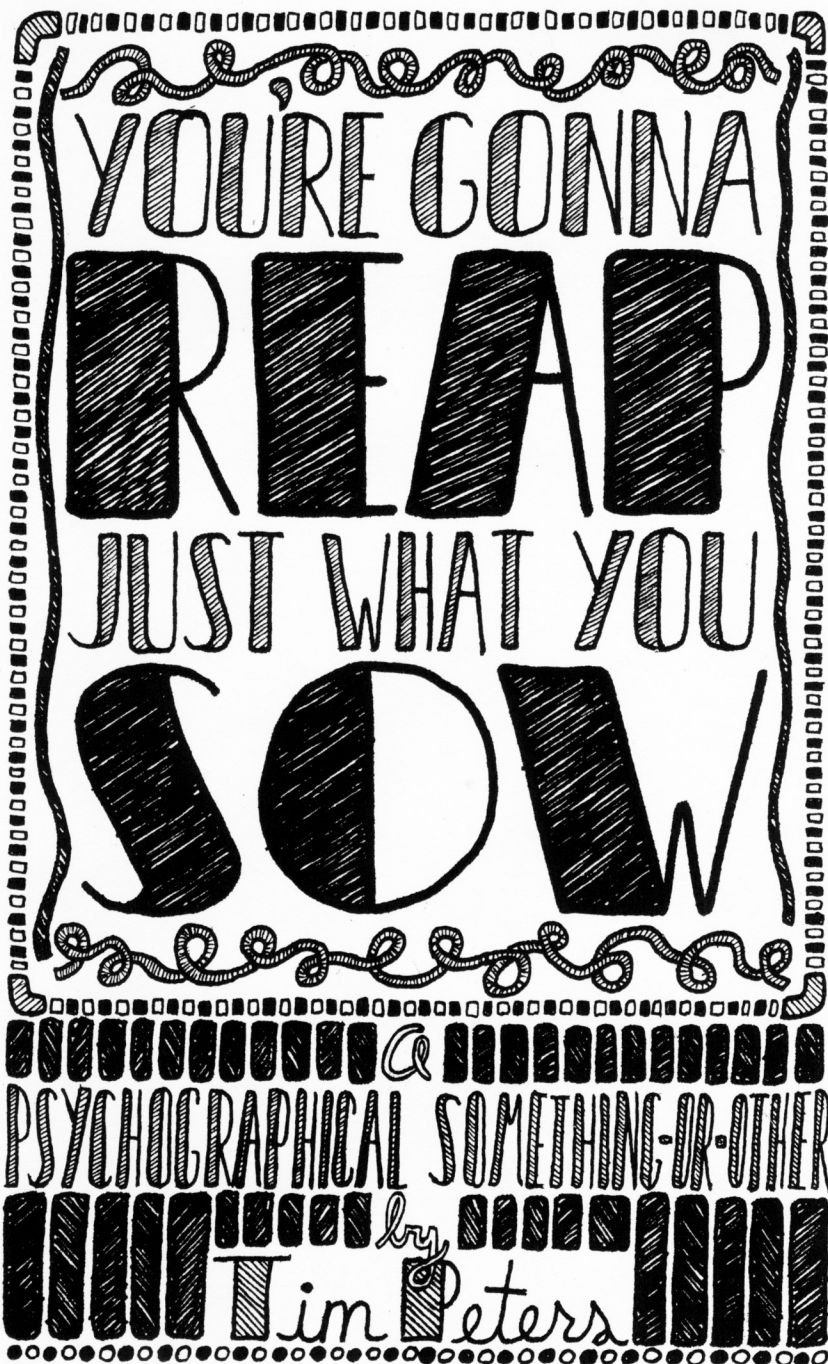




In this chapter

Our protagonist visits a **MONASTERY** in **UPSTATE NEW YORK** where the monks bake **FRUITCAKES** at **CHRISTMASTIME** in order to sell them to Catholics & non-Catholics alike. And the reason for this sojourn to such a sacred bakery? To see an old friend who was once a **CORPORATE LAWYER** but who's now a **NOVITIATE FRANCISCAN**!

And now, let us proceed into our young hero's head.

MTA METRO-NORTH

PORT JERVIS LINE

to SLOATSBURG

11:42 a.m.

DEPART

12:30 p.m.

ARRIVE

anchorite - a

religious recluse

[from 'ana' (back) +
'khora' (a place)]

soteriology - the doc-

trine of salvation

[from 'sotēria' (salvation)
+ '-logy']

Save me
from the city!

Crossing the
HUDSON

Man did **THAT** feel great, removing myself from
the entire New York City/Long Island geographical
complex. **WHEW!** I'm back on solid ground...

Exit Ramps Lead Right Back Here

ALLURE For millions of people, New York City holds an appeal that is not easy to explain.

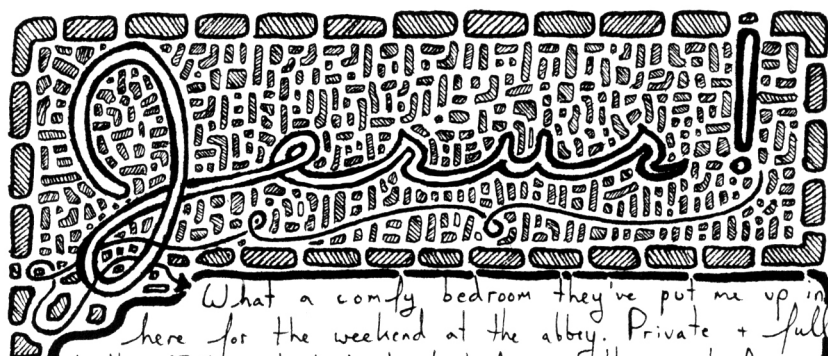
Title of a let-me-tell-you-what-a-yuppie-I-am-and-how-much-I-**LOVE**-pathologically-life-in-New-York-City-type Op-Ed article I read in the Times while taking the train upstate. D'oh?...

RUSTY
two-door
seafoam
CIVIC

NOSTALGIA
for the
MEDIOCRITY
of the
SUBURBS

Vehicle Bill came & picked me up in at the Sloatsburg train station. It belongs to the abbey, he said. Suddenly I thought of Hesse's Narcissus and Goldmund, that a 21st century / non-medieval Goldmund wouldn't get thrown from his horse (like what happened to him when he left the monastery again near the end of the book), but rather he'd crash his car into a telephone pole or something like that... hmmm... **WHE!**

Is this what I was feeling as Bill drove us to the Five Guys in the spread out strip mall wasteland on the outskirts of Sloatsburg? Judging by the **ENTIRE BAG** of **CAJUN FRENCH FRIES** that I ate once we got inside, yes, it was something like nostalgia I felt.



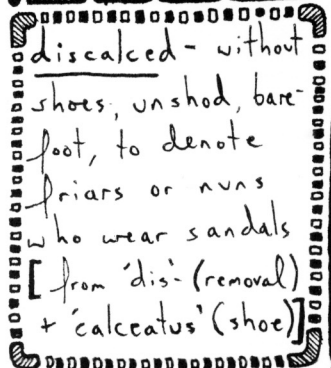
What a comfy bedroom they've put me up in here for the weekend at the abbey. Private + full bath. Fully stocked bookshelves with spiritual + secular lit. alike. Leather prayer chair in the corner with accompanying leather footrest. Well-lit writing desk with fancy ass creamy Italian stationery in the drawers. Drapes. Blinds. A portable space heater. A crucifix or two + some devotion + hagiographical prints of Francis of Assisi framed + hanging on the wall. I mean is this lived + felt + experiential proof of "A Room of One's Own" or what?! That, like, if the room you're working/writing/thinking in is the vessel within which you're trying to, you know, travel through the cosmos of your psyche then it better be a sturdy + well-equipped + well-ventilated structure...

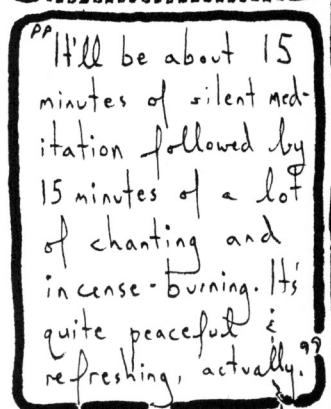
And it better not have fucking squirrels + rats living in its walls, digging + chipping + scurrying for mates!

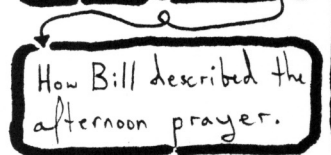
from a prayer card in the bedroom...



The TOLLING of the BELLS


disalced - without shoes, unshod, bare-foot, to denote friars or nuns who wear sandals [from 'dis-' (removal) + 'calceatus' (shoe)]


PP It'll be about 15 minutes of silent meditation followed by 15 minutes of a lot of chanting and incense-burning. It's quite peaceful & refreshing, actually.


How Bill described the afternoon prayer.

Bill said that even the brothers' afternoon nap is signalled by bells here, & all the sessions for prayer, & the meals + the work times & lights out. All of it. Every day. Which made me think that my whole notion of a bell-ringing regimentation schedule system doesn't originate in, like, that 19th century factory/public school complex, but must go way the fuck back, to the Middle Ages or the Dark Ages. When were bells even invented? The Bronze Age? Regardless, it's certainly a lot more aesthetically pleasing & easy on the brain/ears to be guided around by an actual bell ringing from an actual belfry than that bullshit synthesized oven-timer-type death tone they used in our high school, or too that fire drill freakout-type bell in our elementary school...
 

"an EMBITTERED, SUB- URBANITE DRUDGE of a PRIEST"

What Bill told me he worries he'll become some-
day, this despite his University of Chicago education,
his law degree, + his travels through Asia
+ Africa. He told me this while we were play-
ing chess up in the library, before lights out.
Basically, he feels like giving oneself over
to a monastic existence — regardless of how
seriously or non-seriously you take all the theo-
logical dogma, the Bible, the Pope, etc. — that
surrendering one's ego + selfishness + competi-
tiveness has made him feel like, on the other
side of that process, he'll come about being,
like, semi-lobotomized, stupid, missing his crit-
ical edge + missing what made him an interes-
ting + insightful + talented human being. And
yet short of an actual lobotomy, he's never
REALLY going to be able to purge from the
pits of his psyche his desires to, you know,
be great, excel, dominate, see clearly, accept
no bullshit — hence a doomed feeling that
he's heading for a fundamental conflict /
spiritual + intellectual gauntlet... 



FRUITCAKE

PRAYING

makes it taste better?

What creaky old Brother Larry said to me half-facetiously in the kitchen this A.M. when I went in there solo looking for the doughnuts Bill said a sweet-toothed parishoner drops off at the abbey every Sunday morning. Bro. Larry was placing fruit-cakes inside plain white tins & said they were going to sell them in the narthex after Mass. He said a blessing over each cake after sliding it into its tin. What he said about praying making it taste better reminded me of what Hem said in A Moveable Feast, about how when you're hungry the paintings look better, which made me wonder if there's some sort of connection between asceticism & aesthetics. That like praying, meditation, fasting, & solitude in general all somehow... **ACTIVATE** your senses & your faculty to perceive things as beautiful & wondrous. Didn't Joseph Campbell say that before revelation comes purification, that you have to, like, clean out your consciousness in order to receive something sacred into it...? Hmm...

narthex - an ante-chamber or large porch in a modern church

moveable feast - a religious feast day that does not occur on the same calendar date each year



Did I go to town on those doughnuts or what once Bro. Larry & his Adidas flipflops sauntered off to the sanctuary for Mass. I poured myself a cup of coffee & a glass of whole milk (no 2% or skin milk bull

shit for these Brothers) & I ate two Boston Creams & two powdered old fashioned, & then leaned back in my chair & skimmed through the Times & sipped some (Maxwell House, alas) coffee & peered out the big living room windows toward the pond & the geese & the woods & the drab wintery subdivision way in the distance, & just then it started to snow very gently, & I felt a kind of peace + contentment + inner + outer stillness that's been missing & unavailable since moving to New York. After finishing the paper, I walked back to my room, shat, shaved, & showered & nestled myself in the prayer chair to read & think & wait for Bill to get back from Mass.

The ESOPHAGUS to CHEE

IN CRISIS?
Life Net
24-HOUR HOTLINE

Saw this on a callbox on the G.W. bridge. Thought they should put one on every corner in the city!

What the George Washington Bridge felt like this afternoon as Bill + I crossed over from Jersey in the seafoam Civic. It felt like that big + ominous gateway entrance in Jurassic Park, & all those trucks that were passing us — the noises from their engines & their gear shifting & exhaust — it all sounded like the bloodthirsty snarling + growling of... primordial night-marish beasts!

A typical barcode

GOD'S LAST OPPORTUNITY

666

027393 000146

MasterCard VISA

from the cover of a pamphlet I found on the floor of the ① train I took home after Bill dropped me off in the city. I have returned. III

THE END