



# coffeehouse theology

poetic ramblings of harold smith

<http://www.haroldsmithart.com>  
harold@haroldsmithart.com

## Coffeehouse Theology I

The hazy  
Afternoon sun  
Does its thing  
Placidly  
Dancing on the sides  
Of neatly trimmed red brick buildings  
and  
Casting long shadows from  
Dusty Stop signs  
and  
stripped, bare trees

The chatter is  
Almost a din  
As I sit  
By the window

Jazz plays  
Gently over sultry vocals  
Dancing over words

I hear the sound  
Steaming  
Of the espresso machine  
Against rushing water

College girls  
Pierced  
Shabby chic  
Remnants of grunge  
Lithe bodies  
In clashing colors  
All muted  
Under hoods  
Skullcaps and  
Thick rimmed glasses  
Flowing dresses  
Urban bohemians  
Griots of 21st century enlightenment

The tile floor  
Is scuffed and in dire need  
Of a waxing

Exposed pipes and archaic furnishings  
Clashing with  
Stainless

Track lighting

A shaggy haired boy  
With light blue eyes  
Dances about  
Smiling broadly  
Living in euphoria

He is loved  
And he knows it

Vivaldi is playing

The older couple is here  
Short and bespeckled  
Her sweathered arms across her chest  
His hands deep in his plaid pockets  
Looking out  
Faces illuminated by the afternoon haze  
In silence

A lazy Sunday afternoon

No greater ambition  
But to  
Exist  
Embrace  
Engage the confrontation of the moment  
With a quiet desperation  
And succumb to its  
Peace

(I wish I could lay with her  
Naked  
On the bare hardwood floor  
In the sunroom  
And let the sun dance  
Over our bodies  
As we bask in our imperfections  
Pudges, ripples, waves  
Sags  
Too large  
Too small

Loving each other  
Biodegradeably)

Swinging lights  
Large and bulbous  
With the brashness of Van Gogh

They cast a bit of yellow  
Pall  
Onto this scene

Someone behind me  
Is being interviewed  
They want his talents  
He wants more money

And  
Someone sits alone  
Besides me  
He can't stop coughing

The fat guy  
Gets another pastry  
I think this is his fourth one

They must be good

Two people  
Sit outside the window  
Bundled up  
Wind rushing through their wrinkles  
Like canyons

A bicyclist flashes by  
Her scarf in the wind

I hold this moment  
Smell the salt of it's sweat  
I engage it  
Grasp it in the palms of my hands  
Wrap sweaty anxious gritty fingers around it  
Leaving vague impressions of desperation  
Quiet desperation  
In it

The chatter subsides  
Stainless steel spoons continue to clash against porcelain dishes  
A curly haired child is laughing

This moment  
I breathe it  
I become it

I shall not exhale

## The first words from her mouth

Were  
"I've been thinking  
about  
The status  
Of our relationship"

And  
To be honest

I kind of shut down at the point

I focused on my cup of coffee  
It was nice and dark  
Yet mild  
The way I liked it

I looked in her eyes for a minute

She was saying something about  
Wants and needs  
Sounded like

It came from a book or tape  
Maybe oprah or dr. phil  
Maybe even  
Jerry springer  
I didn't care

I wasn't really listening

Somewhere, a fire truck was racing  
Down the street  
I looked to my right  
At the people walking by the coffee shop  
It was a bluish fall morning

The dim turquoise hue that fell from the trees  
Danced across the orange and yellow leaves  
And the fading green grass  
And even though I was inside  
I could almost taste  
The smell of the fresh rain on the red brick sidewalk

Now

She was talking about sex  
Something about me being unenthused  
And unmet needs

Yeah she's right  
When she's on the bottom  
I'm praying she'll finish so I can roll over  
And when she's on top  
I'm thinking about my next painting

I can tolerate  
Doggy style  
Because then  
I can watch tv  
While she...

Well  
You know

While she says something about  
Three times a week  
Thrust levels  
And multiple orgasms

I took a sip  
And realized  
I liked the way the edge of the coffee cup tasted  
Smooth and porcelain  
somewhat industrial and yet  
ummmm  
marbelish  
like cool marble  
is that even a word?

I looked down  
I'm glad  
I was reading the paper before she arrived  
I really wish I could turn the page  
Then she would know I am not listening

Now, she's saying something about some other guy  
Ok  
I'm not an idiot  
I knew I was not the only one  
Let me look surprised  
I hope she bought it

I leaned back  
And just looked at her  
She's saying something about long range plans  
Planning is good

What shall I plan to paint next?  
And I wish I had an extra \$1500

So I could get that new canon hd camcorder  
Oh well

I can hear an older couple  
A few tables over  
Behind me and to the left  
Shades of an Eastern European accent  
Or is it Latin American?

They just got back from church  
He in the plaid suit  
She in the scarf and overcoat

Arguing religion

I think I've seen them before  
Arguing religion

At another coffees shop

And  
I realized

I kind of like the dim and weathered look  
Of this place  
The dinginess  
Speaks to me  
And the cracked and yellowing tiles  
Talk my language  
The silverware is burnished  
But the pastries are always good  
Real good

And the homeless people are the best conversationalists  
Maybe it's because they have nothing to lose

But the bathroom is small  
And I made the mistake of sitting close to it one time  
I never knew it could smell like that

Hmmm  
Back to her  
Now  
She's handing me back my key  
Trying to look sad  
I thank her  
She stands  
I sit  
I guess she's not coming back  
Because

She hugs me  
And she's gone

*By the way  
I think she ate the last  
Of the granola*

I sit

Alone  
Looking at the bluishness outside  
And the dinginess within

Hearing

The clank of silverware on porcelain  
And coffee brewing  
And old people arguing  
About religion

I think about something  
I read once

About a woman  
Who was engaged

She was in 9/11  
Trapped in the rubble  
They had to cut off her arm  
To save her

Her fiancée couldn't handle it  
And left her  
While she was still in the hospital

She cried

But

She met someone a month later  
Who lost his leg  
In the same building

They got married  
Six months later

And

Started having babies  
A year later

And  
She said

She was in great pain  
But

She had to go forward  
Because  
Time does not wait

Time does not wait

And in that moment

I had an  
Epiphany of sorts

I realized

That

I was ready  
For another  
Cup of coffee

And

This time  
I think  
I'll have a pastry  
too

## abstraction

can i  
vanish  
into the abyss  
of your abstraction  
while you  
drown  
in mine?

can i run  
the fingers of my  
inquisitiveness  
slowly  
across the canvas  
of your intellect?

i want to  
feel the  
texture

the vivid colors  
and  
overlapping patterns  
mysterious shapes  
and random lines  
of your character

they  
entice me

your thought  
process  
is beyond form  
and so undefineable

i don't recognize what i see  
but i can't deny what it means

your abstraction  
it draws me

the magnetism of your  
uniqueness

screams

across the room

why do you have to  
be  
so damn different  
and beautiful  
in it?

i want  
to hide  
from it

it scares me  
because  
it draws me

and  
i don't want to become  
addicted  
to your abstraction

but  
i fear

i have no choice

## Wind chill

Whistling  
Across the soulscape of her consciousness  
Dashing  
Across the tops of trees  
These  
Trees of blurred thoughts  
Once buried  
In seas and sands of business  
Now  
No longer hidden from view  
But  
Springing forth  
And  
Projecting themselves  
Into the starry sky  
Of tomorrows dreams

And continuing to whistle  
Down the trees and into the  
Valley of her  
Subconscious  
Until it reaches  
The babbling river of thought  
That flows so shallow  
Exposing the  
Slippery rocks  
Of trust

First words  
Memories from the crib  
Hazy  
Visions  
From the high chair  
Cast about

Like the hazy autumn afternoon  
That illuminates  
The skyscrapers with  
A golden sheen  
Sliced with intense  
Flashes of  
Bright  
Sunlight  
And vanishing  
Into the  
Cool autumn night

Wind chill

Thoughts once buried  
Now resurrected  
Walking amongst the  
Living  
Reminding  
The  
Soul

Ghosts of dreams  
Deferred  
Then buried  
And hopes  
That languished  
While expectations  
Flourished

Youthful ambitions  
Swept away  
In  
The sea  
Of  
Reality

Washing ashore  
Upon the  
Soul  
Of another

Wind chill

Her thoughts huddle tightly  
Inside her  
Trying to stay warm  
The body heat  
Of hope  
Protecting the  
Faint  
Flickering  
Fire  
Of  
Tomorrow

Wind chill

Putting on  
The brave face  
For the naïve babies  
And worshipful children

Laughing at their laughter  
Feigning wide eyed wonder  
At their hopes

Whilst  
Dying  
Inside

The wind is very cold

And she

Just

Wants someone

To

Hold her

life....like water

i long for  
life..like water

life that is  
pure  
and free  
transparent  
clean  
descending from above

quenching

refreshing

when  
dirtied  
sulled  
poisoned

it  
ascends  
back into the sky  
and is  
purified again

taking form of  
clouds  
floating  
carelessly

until fulness of time  
to rain

i long for  
life..like water

descending down

each day  
a miracle anew

nourishing  
replenishing

pouring down  
the faces of  
the children

as they dance  
in my cooling presence

trickling  
as the salty tears  
of the drought laden farmer  
as he weeps in joy

stimulating the mind  
of  
the reflective author  
as he finds inspiration

blushing  
as lovers find solace and passion  
in the soothing sounds  
of my descent

i long for  
life...like water

i want my intentions  
to be plain

i want my soul  
to be clear

my character to  
be...  
like water

i long for  
life...like water

no additives  
no preservatives  
no coloring

just water

just me

i long for

life..like water

life...

as me

## Death of the Black Intellectual

The black intellectual  
Is dead  
And  
No one heard him die

His desire to elevate  
And illuminate  
Was  
Asphyxiated  
Under the pile of  
Booty shaking videos  
Misogynistic lyrics  
And  
Self-hate driven dialogues  
Disguised  
As modern urban fiction

The black intellectual  
Is dead  
And  
No one came to the wake

His longing to impart  
Knowledge and wisdom  
Insight and Strength  
Resulting in  
The social evolution of  
A strong black intellectual class  
Was  
Lynched  
From the tree  
Of  
Cultural cannibalism  
By the self-serving  
Rhetoric  
Of prosperity mega church preachers  
And  
Race baiting pseudo activists

The black intellectual  
Is dead  
And  
Buried in an unmarked grave

His dreams and hopes  
Were crucified  
With diamond encrusted nails

Created  
By Jacob the Jeweler  
Attached  
To spinners  
Made from  
Barbershop bootlegs  
And  
Polished  
To a brilliance  
By dreams of wealth  
Tudor mansions  
and Escalades  
Borne of white powder and bullets  
And...

Oh forget it...

We all know

The black intellectual  
Is dead  
And  
Sunday ain't coming  
Either

## Realization

Today  
I felt

Like an  
Old  
Man

Sitting  
Silently  
At his  
Cobwebbed window

In  
His  
Tiny  
Fifteenth floor  
Apartment

Surrounded

By his  
Volumes  
Of  
Old musty books

And his  
Precarious  
Cats  
And sipping  
On  
His  
Imported tea

Gazing  
Plaintively

On the  
Children  
Frolicking in  
The  
Courtyard

(They were  
Laughing  
And  
Dancing  
And

Playing)

He  
Touches  
His  
Graying Hair  
And His  
Wrinkled  
Leathery  
Face

And  
He wonders  
Why  
He  
Is  
Alone

Today

I felt  
Like him

And  
In a  
Moment  
I could  
See

That

I've built  
Walls

I've built  
Thick Walls  
Inside

These Walls  
Are  
Barricades  
Of  
Emotional Indifference  
And  
Barriers  
Of  
Romantic Aloofness  
And  
Enclosures

Of  
Paranoid Suspicion  
And  
Ramparts  
Of  
Unfounded Caution

I built  
These  
Walls

High and mighty

To  
Protect  
My heart

Because

I just  
Couldn't  
Let  
It be  
Broken  
Again

Please understand

That

I was  
Tired  
And  
Weary

I  
Was  
Tired  
Of  
Not being  
Accepted  
And  
Not looking  
Good  
Enough  
And  
Not dressing  
Sharp  
Enough  
And

I was tired

Of  
Not  
Fitting in  
And  
Not being like  
The  
Ex-boyfriend  
Or  
The  
Ex-husband  
Or  
Him  
Or Him  
Or  
Him

And  
I was  
Desperately  
Tired  
Of  
Not  
Being the man  
That She  
And  
She  
And  
She

Really  
Wanted  
To be with

I was tired  
And  
Weary

Of all the  
Baggage  
That comes

With being me

So  
With the little  
Energy  
And spirit

I had left

I built  
These  
Walls

And rested  
Behind  
These walls

Just me  
And my pain  
And my memories  
Living  
Behind  
These walls

But now

I see

That

These walls  
Are  
A prison

And the  
Very thing

That I  
Thought  
Would protect  
My spirit  
Has  
Only  
Imprisoned  
My soul

I see

That  
There's no  
Genuine  
Bravery of the spirit  
Without  
Deep  
Vulnerability of the soul

And

I see

That  
Only  
An  
Emotional coward  
Would hide  
Their heart  
Behind  
A wall  
Of callousness  
And  
Insensitivity  
To shield  
Their spirit

From the  
Possibility  
Of pain

I see

That

For too long  
I've let  
The disappointments  
Of  
My yesterdays  
Bind Me  
And  
Blind me  
From the  
Potential  
Of  
My tomorrows

I Realized  
That  
It's  
Time

That  
Time

Emancipation  
Time

I realize

That  
The walls

Must  
Come  
Down

© 2006 by Harold D. Smith

## Play Trane Play

The  
Sweetly intense strains  
Of  
Coltrane's sax  
Leap  
Passionately  
From the speakers  
And  
Dance ecstatically  
On  
The  
Ambiance  
Of the  
Translucent edge  
Of the flame  
That erupts  
From  
The  
Single flickering  
Candle

Together  
They collapse  
Into the  
Inviting  
Arms  
Of  
The  
Soft  
Moonlight  
That flows in  
Through  
The  
Open window  
*(Billowing  
The curtains  
And)*  
Descending  
Tenderly  
Across  
The  
Soft  
Mahogany  
Of her  
Body

Together

We Lay

With my  
Tongue  
I trace  
Every  
Note  
And  
Chase  
Every  
Strain of radiance  
Over  
Every mound  
And into  
Every valley  
That she  
Owns

Until  
Her  
Dams  
Break  
And  
Her  
Rivers  
Flow

And

I  
Replenish myself  
From  
The  
Sweetness  
Of  
Her Nile

**Play Trane Play**

© 2006 by Harold D. Smith

Tear

The one bitter  
Tear  
Wells  
Deep  
In the corner  
Of  
A  
Yellow tinged  
Dim eye  
And  
Slowly  
Seeps  
Through  
The  
Deep wrinkles  
Of a leathery black cheek  
Through  
A grayed and brittle  
Beard  
And  
Softly drips  
Onto  
A yellowed  
Page

John  
Chapter 19

He's  
Remembering

Her name  
Was  
Irene

God took  
Her  
On a  
Gray  
Tuesday afternoon

He  
Misses  
Her

© 2006 by Harold D. Smith

## Rivers

Langston once  
Spoke  
Of rivers  
Ancient, dusky rivers

I know  
Not  
The rivers  
Of which  
Langston speaks

The rivers  
I know of  
are  
The  
Crimson rivers  
That slowly streamed  
From  
The crumpled black body  
As he lay  
Lifeless in the street

And  
The  
Rivers of alcohol  
Yellow, like urine  
That flowed from the bottle  
That fell  
From  
His hands  
As the bullets  
Shattered  
His body

I know of  
The  
Rivers of tears  
That trickled  
From his mother's swollen eyes  
While a frustrated  
Sweaty preacher  
Preached an  
All too familiar  
Eulogy

I am familiar with  
The

Rivers of rage  
That surged  
Through the hearts  
Of his comrades  
As they  
Contemplated  
Sweet  
Vengeance

I've seen  
The  
Rivers of despair  
Sadness  
Resignation  
Anger mixed  
With surrender  
That rumbled  
Though the minds of  
Those who  
Peered over the yellow tape  
The morning after

And

I know of  
The  
Rivers of relief  
That eased through  
The heart  
Of the coroner  
As he  
Pulled over the sheet  
Thinking to himself  
"This is why  
I live  
In an  
Exclusive  
Community"

Langston  
Spoke of rivers  
Ancient, dusky rivers.  
I long to know the rivers  
Of which he speaks

© 2006 by Harold D. Smith

I waded

I

Waded

Into the waters

Of her Tigris

I

Delighted myself

In the streams

Of her

Euphrates

I

Poured

My seed

Into her Nile

She bore fruit

And

I was glad

© 2006 by Harold D. Smith

**I hear the sound**

I hear the sound  
Do you?

It is the sound  
Of a thousand reverberating drums  
Covered in rigid tan skins  
Battered and pounded by  
A thousand tender black hands

I listen to the sound  
Do you?

It is the sound  
Of a thousand clanking iron shackles  
Searing deep into  
Tender black flesh  
Creating even more sounds  
Loneliness  
Sadness

Even  
The silent sounds of loss

(In the darkness  
A young boy silently cries for his father...  
He's on the other side of the ship...  
While his mother is with the hands of the captors...  
She was never be the same...)

I heed the sound  
Do you?

It is the sound  
Of a thousand wailing trumpets  
Of a thousand screaming saxophones  
Of a thousand strumming bass'

This sound  
Is  
The sound  
Of a collision  
Of a thousand sounds  
And a thousand souls

And

A thousand pains  
A thousand hopes

A thousand dreams  
A thousand aspirations  
A thousand tears

And  
A thousand nights  
That lead into a thousand days

I pay attention to the sound  
Do you?

It is the unspoken sound  
Of Coretta's soft tears  
And Mama Till's searing pain

It is  
The sound  
Of a single forlorn gunshot  
In a cheap motel in Memphis

(and so I ask  
why wasn't Martin in the Presidential suite?)

The sound  
Is  
Followed by silence  
Muffled cries in the Audobon Ballroom  
And  
Ossie's poignant eulogy

I hear this sound  
When I can hear nothing else.

© 2006 by Harold D. Smith