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### Letter 1972, December 28, James Tate to Gene DeGruson

James Tate

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28 December [1972]

Dear Gene,

The mail has brought so many wonderful surprises from you in the last three weeks I don't know which to thank you for first. Thank you for the long and interesting letter, for the Denver poems, and thanks very very much for the wedding gift--I should say you shouldn't have but instead let me just say how much we appreciated it and how much help it means to us at this particular tight time. And thanks for the promise of a Walkowitz: it will be the first piece of art in whatever home we find when we return and we will always think of your kindness in giving us such a special gift. Thank you for the original DeGruson Tipple Award Winning Christmas Card, I thought I spotted the Christ-child tangled up at the bottom of the gravel-shute but it turned out to be your initials. And lastly, thank you for the 14 terrific versions of the broadside: the only trouble there is that I like all 14. I mean it, I like them all, so if a decision has to be made I'm leaving that to you I think. I'm very excited about them. How many do you want to print, and what shall be done with them? If you want me to sign a batch I'll certainly be happy to oblige, no trouble whatsoever. I think you should try to make some money on them just to turn back into Little Balkans and help pay some of the expense. Maybe you could do that by just notifying say 15 of the best poetry bookshops around the country and hoping for some orders: I could sign one or two hundred and you could offer them for \$1 or \$2, whatever you think, and maybe unsigned for an enticing small sum, \$.50 perhaps. Well, let me know. And also if, as you mentioned before, you are willing to send some gratis to a list of friends I could provide, terrific. I think it turned out excellently, congratulations, I know you have some sleepy-headed printers--if these are the same who delayed over Amnesia People--and you must be on them all the time to follow your instructions: or am I wrong, did you or your class do this yourself? Ah ha I just looked at your letter of December 11th and now the matter is cleared up: you did do it yourself! Fantastic! It's a beautiful job, Gene!

I was delaying writing to you a week or so because I was hoping to hear from The Seneca Review: I was mad at myself for having sent them the "Later" poem which should by all rights be in The Midwest Quarterly. I sent them the poem along with others November 15th and still haven't heard a word from them. I'm tempted to tell Rebecca to go ahead and print it if she still wishes and I could take care of straightening it out with Jim Crenner, the editor there, I could tell him the situation and perhaps substitute another poem for him to choose from. I'm pleased that you liked the poem. The truth is there have been several dedicated to you over the years, but then I always wait--this time I didn't--before sending them to you, and as with most early drafts time reveals their trembling mortality. So it's good I rushed this one off and I hope it will hold up, whatever it is, for some time to come

It's going to be interesting to see what you end up with in terms of a new house. I was surprised to hear you were looking. The Arma Hotel sounds hilarious and perfect, but perhaps you'll decide it would require too much work and expense to get it liveable. Still, what an idea! A large house sounds great, so you'll at last have an opportunity to get everything, the books and antiques etc in the light they deserve. I dream of those great old Victoria mansions in Fort Scott. But there must be many of those in and around Pittsburg too. Keep me informed ~~of~~ your search.

Charles Guardia's death of course was a shock. What can one say when someone who appeared to dislike, if not hate, life as much as he dies. I can't even say I liked or disliked the man. He made himself somewhat fictional. I never saw him show a moment of tenderness but perhaps you did, and others. I don't know. My office mate at UMass, Harvey Swados, died very suddenly of a brain hemorrhage two weeks ago. He was fifty-two, finally feeling a little acceptance--at least University-wise (he was a full-professor at UMass)--was very busy working on several books, had just bought a lovely home out near Cummington, loved his wife and children, and loved life, was happy, healthy, active. This seemed an unkind blow, though it's foolish to compare.

Your account of Rosalea's Hotel in Harper, Kansas, was bizarre and delightful. I just hope it won't be torn down, and perhaps we can make a pilgrimage some time soon. You know Gene, if you tried to capture all the oddments you've discovered in rural and small-town Kansas ~~in~~ a book, be it a novel or no, no one would believe you. That's the trouble. You have to dampen the truth before the public will swallow it. Still, I would read it, and I would believe you, because I've seen a little of Kansas myself.

I don't know what to think of Cagle doing my portrait. I'll withhold judgment until I have a chance to view it. Which is not to say that I'm not proud that he should think to do it, and that you should be willing to give it space.

I like the four poems you sent me from the Denver trip very much. I know you said they were not revised yet, but I like <sup>im</sup> almost-talky, relaxed way they go--there's an unspoken focus, a confidence, that adds intensity barely beneath the surface. Have your poems appeared yet in Crazy Horse? Any more acceptances?

I seem to be always working on ten poems at once, and this goes on for a month or so, the same ten over and over, and at the end of the month if I'm lucky I have two or three poems. Oh, I think I forgot to tell you: I wrote a children's story, it's called Poor Little Rich Boy, and I think it might be pretty good. At least at this point I--and of course Lisa!--think so. So I sent it off to the Atlantic a couple of weeks ago and haven't heard anything yet. I really hope they'll do it, \*illustrations and all! I'll let you know what I hear. The story is quite funny, though perhaps a bit Marxist--don't ask me how that snuck in, through the heart I guess. I mean, what the hell, it's pretty hard to change some 30 year old mechanic with a poem, but get 'em while they're young....who knows?

not mine

We had quite a nice Christmas with Liselotte's family. An enormous traditional Swedish Christmas meal--and when I say traditional, I mean every family in Sweden has eaten this exact meal on Christmas for the last 1000 years, really. I can't describe it all (partially because I didn't know what half the dishes were) but the main meat course was a certain kind of marinated ham, soaked for days and days before. Then red cabbage, and some special kind of beans, and Yule sausage (Lisa's mother makes all her own sausage--all her own everything in fact and it went on and on, and I must say the Swedes do drink. Lordy, we had snaps for this and snaps for that, and different kinds for everything, with beer all along, and then whiskey and gin, and the merriment doth overflow. They out-did me at my own game! Christmas here goes on for days and days, but I get restless celebrating all the time and am allowed to beg off and return home alone, leaving Lisa there, and get back to work.

I work all the time now, but I'm not bragging because I don't think I get that much good work done; I just feel it's necessary to keep at it all the time and not lose touch. I've tried to write a few articles ~~for~~ various papers here and in Boston, but I haven't submitted any for consideration yet. One day--speaking of Gaurdia--I went by myself to a live-porno show, a common enough thing here, not that normal folks go, but I went with, I hasten to add, the express intention of writing something about it for a boston underground paper called The Real Paper (formerly The Phoenix, quite good). I won't tell you about the show--I sat through a gruelling (grinding) 3 1/2 hours, then, practically dying for fresh air, rushed out and walked many miles home through the dark, where I immediately typed 8 long pages. It needs more work, but i think it will turn out to be a very funny piece if I ever finish it and send it off. I did it really for practice--as I think that might be a viable way to make some money in these circumstances--writing articles, that is, not performing on stage!

I'm still working fairly furiously at trying to put together this reading-tour in March. I got a letter today from Rochester asking me to be in residence at a highschool there for four days, which I answered affirmatively. And I'm writing letters to New Mexico and Pennsylvania and Virginia and New York State and Ohio, slowly piecing things together. I really must make enough for use to live on from March to September, which is a good 1/2 year and no small amount. My planning is never very efficient in these matters I'm afraid. I've got seven readings now--plus the Rochester thing, and maybe another seven or eight letters out that haven't been answered yet. Oh, do you know who I should write to at K.U.? I know they have a poet there but I haven't been able to think who it is. Maybe you could find out. I would very much like to read there, it's a little strange they've never invited me I think. I wrote, reluctantly, Jaffe at UMKC but no workd yet.

We are generally fine and happy. Lisa is of course on vacation from school. We both read a lot during the day, peaceful indeed. We have practically no sociaal friends but it doesn't seem to bother either of us much. She is as sweet as they come and I know you'll approve. She feels like she knows you already.

Thanks again Gene for everything. I hope you've had a good holiday, are writing poems and zeroing in on the perfect house.

*Love, Jim*

P.S. Gene, the more I look at the 14 possibilities with the poem I find I am in fact attracted to one especially: the challenge is now to communicate to you which one that is:

I would describe the paper color as bone-white--not the stark white (which was on a different kind of paper) but the soft white somewhat cream perhaps, with title and name in dark blue and dime in soft silvery blue. Yes, this is my favorite, though I like at least another half-dozen. I tend to not like so much the strong colors, the heavier yellows and gold and the lavender and red. (I'll enclose a poem since I have room.....)

#### A RADICAL DEPARTURE

Bye!

I'm going to a place so thoroughly remote  
you'll never hear from me again

No train ship plane or automobile  
has ever pierced its interior

I'm not even certain it's still there  
or ever was  
the maps are very vague about it  
some say here some say there  
but most have let the matter drop

Yes of course it requires courage  
I'll need two bottles of vintage champagne every day  
to keep the morale high

and do you mind if I take your wife?  
Well, I guess this is it  
we'll see ourselves to the door

Where are we.....?

Jim Tate

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