

CRITICS WHO KNOW JACK

URBAN MYTHS, MEDIA AND ROCK & ROLL



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Joseph Maviglia



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Thanks and love to all!

*'I don't really wanna stop the show
but I thought you'd all like to know
that the singer's gonna sing a song
and he wants you all to sing along...'*

—Lennon and McCartney



Tune into Joseph.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sAS0a65nPE>

or scan the QR Code.



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PREFACE

Introductions are never easy. I remember the last time I met a woman I came to spend a few years with. A friend who was attending an event with me called me over, saying there was someone I should meet. I was busy with the antipasto and wine and my hand was getting fairly oily from the sun-dried tomatoes. In any case, I rushed over to my friend's side and he said: "This is _____." And before I could wipe my hand down on a superbly inefficient mini-napkin, there it was. Oil all over her right palm though I had tried in earnest to lose the oil in a couple of hand shakes leading up to that sort of fateful hand-shake.

Introductions are never easy. Read any introduction to a translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and you will feel nausea (unless maybe you wrote it). I prefer liner notes. Like you would find on old vinyl 33 and 1/3rd long-playing record covers. Or compact disc collections. Though I preferred

the print size on the albums. Liner notes don't seem to go on too long. And they are (were) always enhanced by visuals. You don't tend to get that with books. Sure, there are illustrated books and comics and graphic novels but texts per se rarely have visual introductions. So try and visualize this.

A set of titles coming in early one spring morning. Walking along in the chilly April air and titles coming like lines in a poem. Tumbling in one after another after days of reading, watching TV news and DVDs. Listening to CDs. Playing guitar and walking to parks on the way to cafes or walking to cafes on the way back from parks. Dodging dogs and their leashes. Moving my foot out of the way from an on-coming pram. Remembering MAD magazine and running the neighbourhood streets with my older brother. Getting a song on a Juno Award-winning CD compilation. Being asked to play a song I dedicated to my father for his retirement for the umpteenth time. Watching the umpires tolerate the shenanigans of Major League Baseball players. Digging Coltrane as I turn down the volume on World Cup Soccer. Spending time in a cabin in the woods. Watching a snake slither down a tree and then up again (no apples in sight) and shed its skin.

Think of a day that doesn't exist. Out of time. June 31st, 7 o'clock in the afternoon. When to write the titles out into segments. Think semiotics and Marshall McLuhan. Think of the last time a critic for any medium sat like a fat calf expert, collecting his or her wage for the weekly column while an artist waits on grant submission replies and eats dark bread for protein. Read Dylan Thomas, Walt Whitman, Dante, Auden, Ginsberg and The New York Times again and again. Listen to everything from Leadbelly to Paul Robeson. Then Zimmerman Bob and BRUUUCE and Lennon and meet a woman who wants to sleep in a "tantric" sort of way and whisper "unlunar" incantations (apologies to T.S. Eliot). Dig the moon landing and the radical nature of the New Left circa 1968.


Meet another woman who works as a therapist but is into conspiracy theory. Visit the "pinning" west coast of Canada. Read MAD magazine again. Have more great espresso and try not to spit out the bad ones in

public. Go to the cabin in the woods again. Go because you can't be online and there is no service provider but with your fingers on a portable typewriter, letting your grade ten fingers tap the night away against the glow of candles and kerosene lamps. Shave by moonlight and think of Warren Zevon's Werewolves of London then The Clash's London Calling.

Get back to the city and rent all the available episodes of The Fugitive in black and white and don't pay attention to federal election results. Play a couple of club concerts and run home and try to visualize what a text on all this would run like. Feel ornery because the personal computer gives off too much light and underlines your whole text in red and green. Be grateful that when you write poems or songs on your PC you use caesuras and the PC doesn't know how to underline them. See all the artists in the neighbourhood in beachcomber slacks and Frank Sinatra hats, gawking at the well-toned Victorian houses and whisper how they got to get one.

Dig French, Italian and Spanish radio programming. It seems only the English stations have mile long ads. Re-watch the moon landing of nineteen-sixty-nine. Have more espresso. Try and follow the lines on the latest tattoos on folks in the neighbourhood and think sailors and Moby Dick's "cannibal" Queequeg and bad CSI programs where the technology acts better than the actors (including actresses). They are bad in both genders. Avoid the annual Film Festival at all costs 'cause it costs too much! Chase down the ice-cream truck where a cone costs a dollar and half compared to the three dollars and fifty cents it costs for a badly made gelato. Eat hazelnuts instead. Visit organic markets and grow tomatoes and eggplants. Only withdraw enough money from your ATM each day and not enough for a week 'cause you will spend it all in a day. Leave your bank card at home after you do and let your credit card sit tucked and warm in your wallet at home next to your passport for a real decent other country getaway.





A flock of starlings has just flown over the cabin. Here, deep in the woods, they all sing the same song. All look the same. Probably have names only they know to themselves but in ways we have trouble understanding. And they flock from tree to tree and whoosh up in unison, scattering a few autumnal leaves about, casting a buzz into the late afternoon air. I am lucky, I say. This was not a show I knew anything about. I didn't have a dial or remote to check out what was on. Didn't even have a TV on to tell of the coming feathered friends. Totemists must have an answer for this. Thousands of black starlings must mean something more than migration and, if only migration, that must mean something. This is way beyond espresso and may require a good scotch or grappa! I sip and frolic in their frolic. This is paradise and there are no apples except for a few I picked up on the ride in.

Punctuation and happiness! Exact winds twirling the leaves up and down and bringing on the clouds and rain! Ecstasy! In the beginning there was no apple and no worm! No serpent and no William Jennings Bryan. Nor Clarence Darrow. There may have been Dharma and the self-referential wallowing of cooing doves. The attraction without apples and parentheses that crept up on us like a good landscape will. At times we are convalescing. At times we thrive! May our dreams be vigorous with peace and stretched-out in the morning across open plains. No heed and no redemption. Live in amaze and hum in bliss!


Introductions are never easy. The stage awaits. It's time for sound-check.



THE FUGITIVE

(TV Program)


David Jansen — *Richard Kimble*—always running—a man of health (a doctor) and his future is a question and in turn, day to day, a quest. He fights against injustice first personally and then professionally as a doctor—he has taken “oaths” to care for those that require healing—a healing most distinct—the healing of others’ projected morality. And those that wait in the unconscious valley of their fears have the choice to turn him in or raise their souls to a humanity and humility rarely seen in latter day dramas. Where the pursued is definitely of evil sensibility and the pursuit of the criminal is cast in “black and white.” Raising our need to blame regardless of the corruption of our senses. Our honour and our “biblicality,” our popular beliefs about ourselves as individuals, yet citizens. This



“constant” drives the pain of false accusation that Kimble faces episode to episode into our afterimage day to day. For if we accept the reality of the series’ “noirishness,” we go to bed (or went to bed) thinking of his sins and in turn our sins and those of others we were quick to accuse. This sense of accusation. Of making black and white of the troubles Kimble faces, and the pursuit of him by Lt. Gerard, brings our comforts and our fears to light.

We in turn find ourselves superior and then somehow touch a sense of what we have done wrong that we would wish forgiveness for. Our sympathies and compassion go to bed with us after each episode and we wake to the day, thinking of how fortunate we are that no one is pursuing us for truth except the taxman and death. And perhaps the government and our wives or husbands, sisters, brothers, fathers, mothers, friends and relations may have something on us. Yet they may also fear we have something on them. Maybe not murder but something smaller (for we are not in the direct drama). Only the indirect one, and mistily, unknowingly, as it is always night which fascinates us most with Kimble and the darkness of his initial escape (though he has many). Rarely does he escape during the day. Thus he runs in our dreams.

In these dreams we have repercussions and obsessions and manner of right and wrong. Are forced to make do until the next morning arrives full of rave and comfort, civility and privacy. We do not expect to be encroached upon for matters that are not our affairs. Nor do we like it. We do not practice provocation to assault the boundaries of others’ trials and tribulations but for incidents of fate and coincidence. Richard Kimble symbolizes a time in America (and perhaps other parts of the developed world) where the unwritten code of giving a stranger a hand was still in practice in the post-World War II era when *The Fugitive* was telecast. The country was still considerably rural and morality was uncomplicated. Wheat grew upwards from the ground as long as there was rain and sun.



In the “days of Kimble,” governments were not generally perceived by the public as corrupt entities. The period of 1962 to 1966 was a period of growth and prosperity, and in turn, trust for most of America. Or at least, the aspiration towards a good, honourable life was in the air. Kimble was the great American loner. Forced to be by circumstance. His appeal to us was that he was able to wander, change jobs, meet other women (or men), see the country and the city (albeit through the constant fear of capture). Inventiveness, tenacity and courage added to his Hippocratic oath. Gave him a mantle through which we could see the foibles and honour in our system of morality. We were asked indirectly: *What would you do in Kimble’s situation? Would we want the benefit of the doubt? Would we want ourselves turned in if we knew we had not done wrong? And further: Was it our civic duty (Lt. Gerard) to turn him in or could we judge situations for ourselves and substantiate our capacity for reasoning and critical thinking and a sense of judgment not dependent on the courts of law?*

Richard Kimble’s moments of grace came from his actions (this being the ingenuity of his creators). To create adventure and through that adventure have us as viewers possibly philosophize and moralize in witness to his behaviour. We could at once “be him” and then “be other”—other being a good citizen and turn him in? Or an understanding citizen and help him hide or escape? A runner from false accusation or simply William Conrad’s narrative voice of stark reality, sub-textually saying: *Look at the horror this man faces day to day while you cut your front lawn and trim the hedges and go on vacation.*

The remake or film version starring Harrison Ford cast Kimble further along into the twentieth century (the nineteen-nineties). It is noteworthy that the character as interpreted by Ford moved day to day with fear and a sense of being wronged but rarely did his performance show the subtlety of Jansen through humility and slight movement of eye or lips and awkwardness as though written by Franz Kafka. Ford’s performance was fear and a sense of revenge

towards the one-armed man for having made his life difficult. Jansen's pursuit of the one-armed man was not vengeance but a desire for relief and a return to normalcy. Ford's performance was more superficial. Ironically a more "black and white" representation of Kimble's core.

In short, the story was as important as the character in Jansen's version. As a weekly series, he had the advantage of developing the character over the period of six years whereas Ford had a one time (two hour) shot at Kimble. And the "neatness" of presentation by the TV producers and directors, giving us four acts and an "epilog" suggested to us theatre and tragedy and possible resolution to the circumstances Kimble faced. Even as commercial breaks came along, you had the drama brought to a sense of crescendo by the dominant musical score beginning and ending each "Act."

The period *The Fugitive* was created and filmed in must be stressed here. Early mid-60s America was a time of liberalism coming out after a fear-driven 1950s. The rebel was more than revered through the performances of Marlon Brando and James Dean, and the films about marginalized characters directed by Elia Kazan. The music of the time and culture at large found determined concern with civil rights and non-conformity. By design Kimble was in some ways "the outsider" of Camus. The rebel of the times though he did come from the establishment (a doctor) to begin with. And he was Kerouac's Sal Paradise on the road and also a Hemingway/Faulkner-type protagonist. Almost at times righting wrongs by his movement to claim his prior life. But he was not the rebel of provocation and causelessness. He was driven by a personal sense of freedom from false accusation and in turn, became an *anti-anti-hero*. He chased bikers and carried some of the Republican John Wayne in him, balanced by being *forced* (by necessity not pleasure) "onto" the road.



THE SPIRIT OF ABBIE HOFFMAN

The ultimate American rebel! Make that American shit disturber to many! Instigator — provocateur — athlete — media hip — manic depressive — fighter for justice — street-smart and well-educated — Abbie Hoffman was the best known American rebel since the agents of The Boston Tea Party and Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Hoffman, having grown up in Worcester, Massachusetts and attending Brandeis University (the hotbed of Jewish-American intellectualism and liberal thought), spent his early years trying to make it in small business (and with girls), wrestling through high school and trying to out-smart the next street hustler (with whom he found kinship) as the politics of civil rights and anti-establishment sentiment grew on the horizon.

So what did it take to be a citizen of America in the 1960s to mid-1970s compared to today? One distinct current was an age differential between World War Two parents and their offspring, whereas the movements of 2008 and even the 1990s saw the generations of the '60s and '70s become the "older" generation. Wars (as in Vietnam) existed as do wars today (Afghanistan and Iraq). What changed? What would make a man with the political and street theatre chops of Abbie Hoffman be the odd man out in today's America? Or would he be? Is the current again changing to a counter-establishment premise? And what would Abbie, an American Jew, make of or feel about the Arab-Israeli conflict and the incursions on civil liberties many Arab and Muslim Americans (and other citizens) face within the Babylon of the war against terror?

Hoffman's radicalism was no doubt more authentic compared to the posed rock & roll "stance" of, say, The Rolling Stones. Perhaps closer to the essence of Thoreau and Whitman mixed in with Allen Ginsberg and the Beat writers, and the Jewish-American tradition of 1930s socialism, he finds his channelling? —what he drew from to expose America's fascistic tendencies. What makes a man get arrested time and time again for saying: *Stop the War!?*

What makes a man turn cartwheels after his arrest while protesting the capitalist establishment of the New York Stock Exchange and throw dollar bills down from the gallery to the men in suits and ties below? Could it be Abbie was thinking of the poem by W.H. Auden where, in honour of W.B. Yeats, he says:


*And when the Frenchmen are roaring like
beasts on the floor of the Bourse . . . some one will remember this
day . . .*

Revolution was not just for the hell of it as Abbie said —and yet he did make it fun. The generation he grew up in allowed for fun.

Yes fun! Even in revolution! The media allowed for it. The play of visual and the lights of television screens made revolution something you could see day to day. Add to that the joy and explosive nature of the “new” rock & roll and its never-ending exploration of the subconscious coming to the surface in chrysalises of expression both musical and word-ly—and you have something to invest in as a youth movement. A great sense of space for “fun” not to be ruined by the greed of war and un-required disciplines from earlier (post WW2) times.

Spoils? Spending a lifetime on the run for standing up to the lies of the country’s leaders is hardly a manifestation of living the spoiled life. Master of Agit-Prop and street theatre, Hoffman knew how to create a character that was both outspoken and to address the political issues of the day through a complex consideration of “sign and symbol.” He knew the *semiotics* of effect and the nature of the American media. Fickle for a storyline that showed the counter-culture as unruly, long-haired and “un-American.” Hoffman played off this media need brilliantly time and time again. He became the darling of the “radical chic” and in truth was offered substantial contracts to become a television icon and fashion gadfly for the commercial enterprises wanting to take full advantage of the “youth dollars” the generation was born into. His American-flag shirt was replicated again and again (similar yet more political than Peter Townshend’s of The Who, and his Union-Jack jacket). This proved Hoffman’s great sense of the theatric that the press and commercial interests were eager to pursue and cash in on.

To be defiant was cool and hip yet underlying this “attractive” stance, Hoffman had political chops: a substantial activism based on socialist and other left-leaning ideological frameworks. The freshness or the newness of his antics was in great part the result of the time he lived and “worked” in. The explosion of media and



television. The rush to culture by a high percentage of Americans both young and old. Yet with Abbie, it did not stop at symbol. Risking his life, he and many other young Americans pushed Lyndon Johnson from the White House and helped end the Vietnam War through constant exposure of the hypocrisy and aggressive actions of the State. And with Richard Nixon's paranoid presidency, demonstrations that swayed public and world opinion contributed to exposing Nixon's larceny-driven morality and his eventual demise.

Hoffman committed suicide after years of being on the run. He had plastic surgery to change his well-known features and continued his activism even as a bipolar disorder consumed his once agile and clear, loving mind. Certainly if Abbie were around today he would be yelling: *Steal This iPad!* He made a forceful difference in American politics and culture and it says something that the country he was born in never found a way to honour his contrarianism and citizenry, as much as it seems to love its rebels and sense of integrity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Maviglia is a singer-songwriter, poet and essayist whose work has appeared in journals and media across North America and Europe. His tribute poem *jazz dharma* was commissioned by CBC's *The Sunday Edition* to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Alan Ginsberg's iconic poem *Howl*. His latest CD is *Angel in the Rain*, and his song *Father, It's Time* appeared on the Juno Award-winning compilation *The Gathering*. His composition, *Calabresella/Sooner or Later*, is featured in the film *The Resurrection of Tony Gitone*. A selection of his poetry will be published in Italy in the anthology *A Nord del Sogno (North of the Dream)*. A collection of his poetry, *A God Hangs Upside Down*, was published by Guernica. He is presently working on a new collection of songs for a soon-to-be released CD.