

Lord Buckley – an appreciation, by Allen Schill

http://www.lordbuckley.com/LBC_Home/LBC_Home.htm

Introduction

For those who aren't acquainted with the work of Richard "Lord" Buckley (1906-1960), he was a unique figure in American culture of the 40's and 50's, one who left a profound legacy to the generations that followed. A nightclub performer with a background in vaudeville, he was associated with many noted figures from the worlds of show business. He was essentially a monologist (the term "stand-up comedian" is inadequate) who cultivated the philosophy that we are all Lords and Ladies and that we must drink to the fullest from the river of life. His routines were delivered in a variety of voices, from that of the genial, "immaculately hip" aristocrat who was Lord Buckley, to those of the beatnik/hipster/jazz musician and the charismatic baptist preacher, which all partake of an African-American vernacular. The former voice, matched by his lordly manner and elegant dress (not unlike the style of high society of the 1930's, a formative period for Buckley), was usually reserved for his introductions, when he spoke directly to the audience. The hipster/black idiom he used for the heart of his monologues. Both high and low, one could say, but always high. His monologues took for their material various sources from history, literature, and legend, reinventing the stories in Buckley's own unique lingo, the "hip semantic" which he had borrowed and adapted from the special language of what he called "the American Beauty Negro".

For example, "The Hip Ghan" tells the story of Mohandas K. Gandhi, "The Nazz" that of Jesus, while "Marc Antony's Funeral Oration" and "Is This the Sticker?" reinterpret passages of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* respectively. The main part of "The Bad-Rapping of the Marquis de Sade", a monologue "about a hero in evil" as Buckley introduces it, is a story told by de Sade himself within the monologue, of one Prince Minski, a sort of acquaintance or alter ego of de Sade ("*Looked like a cat with a steel rectum!*"), another incarnation of the Stagger-Lee type, the Real Bad Dude ("*I been all over this here world studying scientifically how to be a bad cat.*"), who invites two couples whom he has casually met to a special feast at his castle-pad. "Nero" tells of the notorious Roman emperor and "The Hip Einie" of Einstein, while "Jonah and the Whale" treats us to an outrageous account of the Old Testament story. "The Chastity Belt" takes us back to the time of the invention – and better, the actual scene of the *introduction* – of that remarkable device at the time of the Search for the Grail. "H-Bomb", besides offering subtle reflections on the importance of humor, is a hilarious send-up of the bomb and the bi-polar (U.S.-Soviet) insanity of those years (with all-too-obvious relevance for our terrified times). He also created hip renditions of historical subjects like the Boston Tea Party, Hiawatha, and the New World adventures of Cabeza de Vaca in the early 1500's, classic stories like the Swingin' Pied Piper (inspired by the Elvis phenomenon), or "Scrooge", based on Dickens's "*A Christmas Carol*", his own stories with contemporary settings, like "God's Own Drunk", "Murder", and "Martin's Horse", and popular poems like Poe's "*The Raven*" and Robert Service's "*The Shooting of Dan McGrew*". Not to be overlooked are his version of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (whose original is itself an immortal prose poem), and his recitation of Joseph S. Newman's "*Black Cross*", to which he pays the supreme compliment of not changing practically a word.

Buckley himself was charismatic and deeply spiritual, with a sincere love for all humanity, and he honored the greats who carried a great message of love, charismatics themselves like Jesus and Gandhi. As such he was a figure ahead of his time, like others of the Beat Generation who were in some ways precursors of the utopianism of the 1960's. (Someone commented that if Buckley had still been alive at the time of Woodstock they'd have carried him to the stage on silk pillows.) He participated in the research on LSD conducted in the late 50's (before Timothy Leary) by Dr. Oscar Janiger - (who was, by an astonishing coincidence, cousin

to Allen Ginsberg). He has had a profound influence on many American comedians, notably Bill Cosby, Jonathan Winters, Flip Wilson (I suspect), and Robin Williams. He was a friend of Lenny Bruce and, like Bruce, had troubles with the authorities who made it difficult for him to work. In fact, his premature death (of stroke, brought on by renal dysfunction and malnutrition, and still the subject of controversy) was the result of a sad chain of events that began when, based on a minor bust many years before for possession of marijuana, Buckley's cabaret card was withdrawn by New York City police just as he was to start an engagement.

Saints and Sinners

For me, the characters (re)invented by Buckley (or better, those to whom he paid the deepest homage) who are closest to his soul are clearly the most spiritual and most idealistic, who, more often than not, were murdered or martyred for their radical idealism – witness Jesus, Gandhi, and Lincoln. (Had Buckley lived to see the advent of Dr. Martin Luther King, he would surely have drawn inspiration from King, and very likely composed a monologue in his honor.) At any rate, Buckley's most inspiring material, the work in which he himself seems most involved, is that for which he chose inspiring individuals for his subjects. (One can only guess what he would have made of Barack Obama.)

On a perhaps lesser spiritual plane but just as richly rewarding are Buckley's treatments of characters more profane – people who, in Buckley's retelling, were devoted to the fullest possible enjoyment of life's pleasures, especially the sensual pleasures as opposed to the spiritual ones, people who partied all the time, who gassed and wailed and grooved. De Sade and Nero are the most obvious examples. It might seem strange to honor persons as diverse as de Sade and Gandhi, but it would be a mistake to suppose, then, that Buckley believed Nero with his determined hedonism to be on quite the same plane as Jesus. Aside from the fact that Buckley's treatments of bad dudes were highly entertaining, he still managed to discern in such louche types something worth honoring in a story. Buckley was a complex character, his worldview all-encompassing and all-embracing, poetic and cosmic, Whitmanesque.

If one is puzzled by Buckley's dual fascination with sensualists and evil persons as well as ascetics, saviors, and visionaries who devoted their lives to others, perhaps a clue lies in his monologue "The Sinner". In this piece, reminiscent of a story in a Baptist sermon, God happens to look down at the world ("from his rosy rockin' chair one hallelujah morning") and He notices an assistant clerk alone in a store, who decides to steal some money from the cash register. Feather duster in one hand, the other hand is in the till up to the elbow when God calls out to him to remonstrate. The clerk, caught red-handed, starts to squeal lame excuses which of course do not even begin to convince God. The sinner finally gives up, and says that the real reason he was trying to steal is that, "Lord, if it wasn't for poor little ol' beat-up sinners like me, Lord, you wouldn't have *nothin'* to do, would you now!", finishing with a smirk of satisfaction that he is quite right. One supposes that even God would have to agree. In Buckley's philosophy of good and evil, a healthy measure of yin and yang is admitted. (It might be noted that, during Buckley's years in 1930's Chicago, when he performed in clubs that were invariably owned by racketeers, no less a figure than Al Capone said that Dick Buckley was the only man who could ever make him laugh. Capone even backed him once in setting up a nightclub, called Chez Buckley (which failed). Capone must have made a very strong impression on Buckley, who could not have been insensitive to the horrible things Capone was doing. I suspect that his Nero and possibly his De Sade owe something to Buckley's experience with Capone.)

The African-American Influence and Old-Time Popular Entertainment

Buckley's art of story-telling, as much as his special hip semantic, owes a great deal to the

African-American tradition of story-telling and the culture of African-American spirituality. One can detect easily the voice of the black Baptist preacher recounting the stories of the Bible, and without much difficulty the echoes of popular black storydom and folk tales with their own echoes of the stories of the African griots. Even Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories derive from this oral tradition. (Harris transcribed the stories of several old black men who assumed this role in various southern communities, and invented Uncle Remus as a sort of synthesis of these men and to serve as a narrative device in which to frame the stories.) In these stories, as in the fables of Aesop, animals are anthropomorphized and given personalities recognizable to everyone as archetypes of people in everyday life. As in the Bible stories told in the black churches, as even in the Bible itself (especially the Old Testament), God becomes a figure of human dimensions, a highly personal God, one who spoke directly to Noah and Jonah and the prophets. This hardly seems same God as the remote, practically abstract God of later times, the God of the sophisticated theologians, a God whom one can hardly imagine directly involved in the lives of his creatures. Such a personal God is typical of the traditions of many old cultures, one that suited the abilities of ordinary people to understand.

One aspect of Buckley's performance that causes some eyebrows to rise, and which has sometimes been misunderstood, is the use by this white man of a black idiom in which to tell his stories. For some this is too reminiscent of the minstrel show, one with its own complex and often shameful history, one enmeshed with the casual racism of American society after what we call Emancipation. In minstrel shows, as is well known, musical numbers and comic sketches were performed by white performers in blackface makeup. Crude racist stereotypes were reinforced with a variety of stock characters, such as the buffoon or the comic negro, the thief, the good-for-nothing, the hustler, the dandy, the lady's man. (Before long, black performers also took part in these shows, themselves wearing blackface makeup, thus playing, in a perverse twist, white people playing black people.) The minstrel show had a profound influence around and after the turn of the century on the development of popular entertainment in America, especially in early cinema and vaudeville. Predictably, African-Americans were usually relegated to minor roles in popular entertainment, and depicted and characterized in ways that were anything but flattering. (The example of minstrelsy best-known to modern times is surely the 1927 film "*The Jazz Singer*", in which Jewish performer Al Jolson played partly in blackface. Acted out against a background of 1920's show business, the personal drama concerns its protagonist's breaking with Jewish tradition to become a jazz singer, while his father, a cantor, expects his son to follow in his footsteps.)

In the vaudeville of the 1920's and 1930's, an entertainment created by and for a highly ethnic and heterogeneous (but not integrated) society, well before modern notions of what is acceptable in ethnic humor, ethnic groups of all types were made the butt of jokes delivered by comedians and other performers of all types – at least such is the popular myth. It is said that the Irish, the Italians, the Jews, and other ethnic types joked as often about themselves as about one another. (Not to be forgotten is that these groups, though often subjected to cruel ethnic prejudice, at least had enjoyed the relatively good fortune to have come to the U.S. through Ellis Island rather than the slave markets of the antebellum period. It must also be said that, to the extent it existed, blacks did not share as equals in such interethnic repartee, nor were they welcome – except possibly on stage – in most of the venues dominated by whites.) African-Americans were not excepted, through any excess of liberal sentiment, from being the subjects of such humor. Although there was a big difference between free-for-all ethnic humor and the odious tone of the "coon show", even the comparatively mild ethnic jokes could not help but partake of the deeply-entrenched racism of a whole society.

Amos 'n' Andy, Mass Pantomimicisim, and Universal Love

One of the most famous and popular programs, first on radio (in 1928, with 40,000,000 listeners in 1930-31) and then on television in the early days (1951-53), was undoubtedly Amos 'n' Andy, a show originated by two white performers who invented a series of black characters. From the remarks of other commentators, and from what I have gleaned from listening to a handful of old recordings, these were relatively mild stereotypes of ordinary urban black people: basically good-natured situation comedy, not sophisticated, but not malicious and no worse than most other popular entertainment of its time, or even later. (The show was considered quite innovative in its time for the way various narrative threads were intertwined to deepen the listeners' involvement in the development of the story.) Still, and with a certain justification, the show came in for plenty of criticism, especially with the growth of the civil rights movement and some much-needed revision in Americans' racial attitudes. (Modern television situation comedy is mainly politically correct where ethnic humor is concerned – no one wants to be accused of racist stereotyping – but seems for the most part to make idiots of the public by pandering to the lowest common denominator, by addressing itself to an audience presumed to have no desire for any intellectual challenge in its entertainment. Now it is the public, as much as the characters of popular programs, that is stereotyped.)

In Buckley's earlier days in show business, before his art of the monologue fully matured, he did a routine based on Amos 'n' Andy called "The Chairs" that was for years the mainstay of his nightclub performance. He called it "Mass Pantomimicisim". He chose four patrons from the audience in the club and had them seat themselves on stage in a row of chairs. He assigned them various roles of the characters from Amos 'n' Andy, explained that he would mime the voices of all four characters while moving behind them in their chairs, and instructed each one to move his or her lips whenever he was crouched behind that person's chair. On one occasion in 1949, for Ed Sullivan's "Toast of the Town" TV variety show, he chose two baseball stars with their wives. In a sort of role-reversal, he made these (generally) white people the butt of the humor that was, in the original program, directed at black characters. The result must have been hilarious.

Whatever one can say about Buckley's use of a black idiom and black characters, or his transformation of other people into black, be they personages of history, myth, or legend, or people from his audience, his attitude towards blacks – and all people – seems to have been benign, to say the least. For Buckley's whole persona, his whole *thing*, was one of magnanimity and universal love. (Quote: "Ladies and gentlemen – would it embarrass you very much to tell you – that I love you?") He was unfailingly courteous and warm; he had the gift for exalting people and making them feel good about themselves. His humor was never malicious or angry. (Compared to much of the stand-up comedy of more recent years, often composed largely of insults, gratuitous profanity, and shrill anger, Buckley's way of making humor is prescriptive.) It was often said of him, moreover, by those who knew him personally or professionally, that he was one of those rare performers who, rather than invent a persona for their act, simply carry their everyday personas to the stage. He was never "in character" or "out of character"; he was Lord Buckley on stage or off.

Aside from the humor and the special brilliance of the material itself, there is an odd dissonance or incongruity in listening to recordings of Buckley's monologues that comes largely from race confusion – not being entirely sure whether one is listening to a black man or a white man. It was surely there also for those who saw him perform and could see very well that he was white, but one who used the body language of the blacks – the dipping, the swaying, the hand-clapping common to many black preachers and entertainers. It may be something like finding oneself strongly attracted to a person without being quite sure whether that person is male or female (though this is pure conjecture on my part, because I haven't had such an experience). However, it reminds me of one morning around 1982 when I was on my way to

work: while leaving the subway and heading through the passageways to Grand Central Station, I heard the distant sound of live classical music. Finally I reached its source in the main concourse, and saw a string quartet of four African-Americans playing Beethoven (brilliantly, natch).

I discovered Buckley only in my college days (1969-73) through a couple of compilation records produced by Frank Zappa and issued by Warner-Reprise. Intrigued by this one-of-a-kind artist, I found a couple of LPs of Buckley's material. The cover art was such that one couldn't be too sure what Buckley was, ethnically, and the liner notes didn't give me any clues, and this was long before you could google yourself an avalanche of information in seconds. "Well, fine either way," I thought to myself, "a genius is a genius". After all it would have been interesting for anyone to speak like Buckley. In fact Buckley was a very tall and handsome man of English, Cornish, and Native American extraction, from Tuolumne in northern California (born just days before the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which is considered the planet's delayed reaction).

Buckley would often end his performance by addressing the audience and saying, "People... people...are the true flowers of life, and it has been a most precious pleasure to have temporarily strolled in your garden." Another: "I hope I don't offend any of your religious beliefs, but I think people should worship people...I really do...I really do."

Buckley and MAD Magazine

While I listened only occasionally to my Lord Buckley recordings over the years, he has always remained a special figure in my personal pantheon of saints and heroes. I came back to look at him closely recently due to a chance occurrence. One day I happened to take down from the shelf a very old paperback book, "The Ides of MAD", from about 1960 (the year of Buckley's death, curiously), a compilation of material from MAD Magazine, something I probably hadn't looked at since I was a teenager. In it was an article (in "The Bard of Birdland Department") called "Shakespeare Up-To-Date – Marc Antony's Funeral Oration" which put Shakespeare's "old" version alongside the new "MAD" version. (I don't know the date of the original publication of the article, which was possibly a few years before the ca. 1960 compilation, but certainly well after Buckley's 1951 performance.) I remember having been quite amused by this when I was nine years old, when I had no idea who Buckley was (he was not mentioned in MAD). This time I flipped! – I was by then very familiar with Buckley's monologue and some kind of connection seemed all too obvious. Though MAD's opening line gave it away as different – even if I hadn't listened to Buckley in years I knew his "Hipsters, flipsters" opener by heart – I had to listen again to the record and compare the entire piece to MAD's version to be sure they were completely different even though based on the same idea.

Given the sometimes trite vocabulary of hip talk, I would have expected an occasional use of the same word to interpret the original in both pieces. But at no point did MAD use the same word as Buckley. This is either a striking coincidence or the case of someone (quite likely a Buckley fan) who was doing a rewrite and wished scrupulously to avoid plagiarizing Buckley, probably comparing his work with Buckley's line by line for that very reason. Buckley is more inventive with his hip phraseology, but I must say that the MAD version, even if derivative, is pretty good. It's also conceivable that Buckley might have done a rewrite of his own for the pages of MAD. It would be interesting to know about such cultural influence by Buckley on a satirical magazine for kids (and adults who think young) – hip culture seeping into the tender and impressionable minds of young Americans.

I wrote a short e-mail to MAD Magazine to inquire (in a friendly and non-judgmental way)

about this matter – this was early in 2007). I got no answer (nor did I get a response late in 2009 when I sent a follow-up letter). But I also sent a copy of my first letter to a website devoted to Lord Buckley. From this I got a very kind response from the person who manages the site, who recalled having heard something about this connection before, saying that he would pass my question on to his site's archivist. About my question I have not heard anything further, but the site manager, Michael Monteleone, and I have corresponded and shared a few of our thoughts about Buckley. He is a filmmaker and has created a documentary on Buckley called "Too Hip for the Room". (I have seen the trailer only – but the film seems exceptionally well-made and indispensable for anyone interested in Buckley.) He very kindly passed to me quite a few Buckley audio files of material that had been unknown to me.

All this activity inspired me to write this appreciation – mainly and simply for myself, but partly also to introduce Buckley to an audience (in Italy) unfamiliar with him, on the occasion of the release of the film. (I know one or two Italian publications that pay close attention to the American cultural scene.) This has gone nowhere for now, but I am glad to have written the piece. I have since gone on to many other distractions, as well as my main gig as a visual artist, but have had occasional reflections on Lord Buckley, especially since I have had the time to listen a bit to lesser-known and rare material, plus other performances of familiar monologues, and would like to share them.

Observing the Recordings – Shades of the Past

(The above verb will seem a bad choice, but the section heading is just a play on a well-known Buckley quote, with its hint of synaesthesia: "Do you see any music?")

One of the interesting things about these old recordings, besides the material itself, is that little trip into the aural past they allow (like Scrooge with the Ghost of Christmas Past), especially the live recordings where you can hear the audience very well. Occasionally he shows a side usually hidden behind his geniality and his air of alcohol-and-drug-influenced casualness, a slightly control-freak tendency (as when he complains to the audience that they mustn't disturb his timing). When he deals with the hecklers, I suspect he could outdo Don Rickles for barbs.

Comparing different performances of the same monologues, one notices that his performances were extremely consistent. Buckley varied his exact wording, timing, and delivery very little. Much has been said about Buckley's delivery being inspired by the rhythms of jazz. However, his vocal riffs were not improvised in the sense usually associated with spontaneously improvised music, but rather in that of the carefully developed solo that a performer brings to perfection and then follows more or less note for note in every performance. Buckley's ad libs he kept mainly for the intervals, the patter; the monologues stayed pretty fixed.

Though it is only a trivial observation, but a version of "His Majesty the Policeman" (not the one best-known from a recording, but one with a band and a children's chorus) forcefully reminds me of Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Women 12 & 35", better known as "Everybody Must Get Stoned". Dylan's rhythm, along the crooked lines of a marching band (drunken) and an oompah band (stoned), seems adopted more or less intact from Lord Buckley. The spirit and sense of humor are also similar. This is mere speculation of course (especially since this version may not even have been in circulation back then), without Dylan's confirmation, but the resemblance is uncanny.

Black Cross – Too Hip for the Room

However, I made another observation, important and certainly disturbing, having to do with race, as I looked back through time this way, listening to the old material. But it is not Lord Buckley who is disturbing but some of his public of that era, in particular some shamefully unhip individuals. It concerns a performance of “*Black Cross*”, a poem of 1948 by Joseph S. Newman which was recited by Buckley. Anyone unfamiliar with the poem will need a bit of explanation. The poem concerns a black farmer in the south with a small plot of land, who had the impudence, in the eyes of the local white folks, to read – he kept a few books in his shack. A white preacher was sent to interrogate old Hezekiah about his religious convictions. Hezekiah answered him exceptionally well (I am sure he could have held his own even with a more intelligent theologian-interlocutor), but the preacher went away unsatisfied.

The last verse goes:

There's a lot of good ways for a man to be wicked...
They hung Hezekiah as high as a pidgeon, (sic)
And the nice folks around said, "He had it comin'
'Cause the son-of-a-bitch didn't have no religion!"

This is as powerful an evocation of monstrous ignorance and cruelty as I have ever heard, as overwhelming and shaming as “*Strange Fruit*” (the 1936 poem and song by Abel Meeropol), as unforgettably performed by Billie Holiday.

Most of the performances recorded – I have listened to five different ones – suggest a sensitive reception by the public. (One is from a special celebration for Henry Miller.) Buckley’s delivery is quite consistent, sometimes a bit loose and sometimes more restrained. But Buckley, out of mere decency and intelligence, isn’t playing for laughs; he wants us to listen and feel the power of this story. (It must be said that the earlier verses of the poem are sensitive and ironic, and never begin to suggest the horror of the last.)

But in one performance of “*Black Cross*”, at the Golden Nugget, the audience seems a bit rowdy. As the poem progresses through the interview, with Hezekiah’s shrewd observations provoking the humor, the people laugh along (perhaps too hard for the material). But at the last stanza, the finale, they just crack up as if it were the funniest damned thing they’d ever heard – a lynching. I sensed a brute insensitivity that today would be unimaginable outside of a KKK meeting. I suppose Buckley was tempted to remonstrate with them for their baseness and their stupidity.

Incidentally, Buckley reversed the order of two stanzas in Newman’s poem, improving it in my view. Where the preacher challenges Hezekiah’s beliefs, the question about Heaven is put last, which makes the expression more powerful, because Hezekiah’s answer here is stronger, and to the preacher, more blasphemous – “I don’t expect nothin’ from Heaven OR the Lawd” – than his canny remark that “the Church is divided” and so “I ain’t decided”. Other than that, Buckley’s respectful seriousness towards the poem and its subject was such that he didn’t re-do it in the hip semantic, a rare thing for him. He delivered it very much as written. (Further evidence of Buckley’s sentiments about humanity and about race, if needed, is his “*Georgia Sweet and Kind*”, a bitterly ironic collage of the old sweet song with the racist abuse, ending with a lynching, of an ordinary person.)

Appended below are a few notes pertaining to certain monologues, and a collection of quotations from several others, some of them accompanied by comments.

God's Own Drunk

This marvelous story, set in the deep woods, suggests the legends of the American Indians, in particular, the stories of the young man's coming-of-age vigil in the wilderness, and his encounters with animals, and his communication with a spirit guide. (Buckley was part Indian, it is said.) Most interesting is his concept of the redeeming power of the altered state of consciousness: "I was God's own drunk – a fearless man." (Buckley was also quite a boozier, and before he discovered marijuana, alcohol apparently served him as a mind-altering substance.) Although stories can have complicated geneses – anything goes – this story also might have something to do with Buckley's background in the woods of Northern California and his lumberjacking period. With its backwoods setting, the story may also be a sort of cousin to "The Ballad of Danny McGroo", another monologue-poem (based on Robert Service's poem "The Shooting of Dan McGrew"). Both pieces have the flavor of the story-telling traditions of the North American woodlands.

Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, "The Gasser"

This story, about the desperate situation of the early Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca, and his miraculous salvation through an act of blind faith, may have had something to do with Buckley's irregular finances. Buckley tended to spend money as fast as he made it (not putting anything away "for the rainy season" as Hezekiah Jones did), and often found himself without funds. Perhaps when things went well for him and he was flush, he saw it as some kind of divine reward for his faith in "the Great Lake of Love".

Buckley's monologue takes Cabeza de Vaca ("The Gasser") and his men as far north as North Dakota, but Buckley exaggerates. Cabeza de Vaca saw a lot of the Gulf of Mexico, and traveled as far as present-day north western and western Mexico. Buckley's chronology is also a little off, as this seems to have been from 1528 to 1536, rather than "fifteen-hundred and leapin' ten".

More interesting is Cabeza de Vaca's speech (or rather, part of what Cabeza de Vaca wrote to the king) at the end of the monologue:

"I found out on this expedition that there is a great power within that when used in beauty and immaculate purity can cure and heal and cause miracles. When you use it, it spreads like a magic garden. And when you do not use it, it recedes from you."

This is pure Buckley – but I wonder if Cabeza de Vaca himself wrote anything similar. He was a man of faith and considered by many Indian people to have healing powers.

Maharaja, or The Cop-Out

Speaking further of material that reflects Buckley's personal situation (v. above note on Cabeza de Vaca, and previous comment re Al Capone), the intro to this monologue seems unmistakably autobiographical:

A cop-out is a kind of a chap that you have around,
once in a while, sometimes for many years,
that you want to kill him.
But you just can't quite get to it.
'Cause every time he gaslights you,
he comes around with such a wonderful story
that – he entertains you so strongly with the story
that you forgive the accident or the catastrophe
or the flip or the delinquency.

These lines seem to refer to Buckley directly, and to his role as a sort of court jester or fool, the only member of the court privileged to say whatever he wants to the lord without fear of dire punishment. I wonder again about Buckley's position in the Capone retinue. (This sense is quite different from the one I always had of "cop-out", i.e., to withdraw from responsibility with weak excuses or rationalizations.)

Martin's Horse (and "Moaning" and other monologues)

This story, one of Buckley's stories that have a contemporary setting rather than a historical one, is remarkable for the heated sexuality with which the jockey Martin speaks lovingly and seductively to his horse, thus exciting her (?) and inspiring her to win the race from far back in the field. (Thus giving new meaning, incidentally, to the phrase "animal husbandry".)

The barely restrained sensuality of this material must have been powerful stuff 60 years ago. Similar are his "Moaning for Life" and "Moaning for Pleasure", which could possibly have gotten one arrested for obscenity back then in many localities. Exciting as well is the vivid allusion of "Subconscious Mind": "Have your nose rubbed in a rose garden, so many roses...", which is reminiscent of Molly's soliloquy in Joyce's "Ulysses". Roses indeed!

Not too far from this is "Let It Down", which sounds sometimes like a person chanting "Om", sometimes like a preacher, and sometimes like a heavy-petting session, but turns out to be a man milking a cow.

Selected quotations of Lord Buckley:

The Bad-Rapping of the Marquis de Sade

This is probably the quintessential Buckley story, the Sistine Chapel of his oeuvre. It has, however, a somewhat complicated structure (not that this interferes with one's enjoyment of the story). Soon after the beginning, that is, in the part cited here, Buckley is quoting the Marquis de Sade. At "Now you take one look at my television face", the voice returns to Buckley.)

He said "if you're cuttin' down a real crazy, wild, country road, on a cool, pretty day, and the breeze is comin' on and ricocheting the sweet perfume of the wild flowers of life, and you feel a halleluyah call in your soul, and you swing around the corner, and there in front of the tree stands a pretty little chick with a lettuce petty-coat, and you never dug her before in your LIFE, and you walk right up to her and you say,

'Baby, it's you and me ---- behind the tree!'

And she say 'No,'
SHE'S GOIN' AGAINST NATURE!

And any cat know you can't do that!"

Now you take one look at my television face and you got to know I didn't get all these miles on my puss in one lifetime. You got to get hip to the fact that I'm a reincar-nated cat!

And I knew The Marq real cool!

(At this point, in a transitional passage, Buckley speaks in his own voice about de Sade, then:)

And there are a lot of times when you hear something wild, something crazy,

something insane, and, you see, the humorous thing will reach such a high altitude that you say to yourself, "Now that's, that's no longer funny."

But if it is humor and you proceed further and instead of ending you *ne-gate* under the license of humor, you find out there's a whole new strata up there.

'Cause humor goes in a complete circle, like the world.

Humor is the isle of the soul.

Here follows Buckley's main story, passed to him (presumably in a former incarnation) from the Marquis himself, of two couples cuttin' up his (de Sade's) last party, when in walks Prince Minski. The five then proceed to Minski's party-pad.

This is a very general suggestion about influences, but it seems to me that the high-pitched voices of the fast-talkin' girls in "The Bad-Rapping of the Marquis de Sade" ("If you ready we ready but if you ain't ready we ain't ready but if you ready we ready!!!") – are possibly inspired by "Gabby" from Amos 'n' Andy (even though Gabby is a man). And it may be that Buckley influenced Flip Wilson in turn in his character Geraldine (and in similar female voices), even if Wilson clearly had his own gifted ear for comic voices.

Chastity Belt

As you know, between the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century,
there was a tremendous epidemic that swept the land.
Everyone was going in search of the Holy Grail.

...

"A chastity belt, your majesty,
to preserve the honor of your Lady Faire while you,
brave one, go in search of the Grail."

...

"Well," he says, "I suppose you could call it that, Sugar.
Yeah, that's what it is, a jewel case."

Aside from the outrageous comic situation that Buckley creates, I notice that, in referring to the search for the Grail as an epidemic in his intro, he is commenting ironically about religious mania and perhaps an imperialist mentality. Those who were seeking the Grail easily conflated it with the conquest of the Holy Land. This may have some relevance today.

H-Bomb

And I, in humility, say, "It is the duty of the humor of any given nation in times of high crisis to *at-tack* the catastrophe that faces it in such a manner as to cause the people to laugh at it in such a manner that they do not die before they get killed."

This reminds me of the line from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, "Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once", cited in the 1920s play *The Valiant*, by Holworthy Hall and Robert Middlemass, by a man facing execution. Both plays had been assigned in school, and were known to me at thirteen or so.

My Own Railroad

The Truth, the truth is strange to the ears even wild truth,
wild truth, things that happen ...
they supercede and carry on beyond the parallel of your practiced credulity.

And you say, I'm lyin', that may be the truth.

For instance one time in Chicago I had isolated myself to the point that I lost my love and my contact with the people I loved, to the people and I couldn't get to them, they didn't know that ... Hello ... I loved them, but I suddenly backed away I ... all those love strands and I tightened up ... I had money in my pocket and I had a real long set of wheels I had to go somewhere, I didn't want to go anywhere, I didn't want to see anyone I knew, anyone I ever knew, I didn't want to meet anyone new. I just wanted to be alone. Whewww...

To hear this confession from Buckley saddens and surprises. The remainder of the bit, funnier but at times hard to follow, is surrealistic or oneiric – something like a story from Carlos Castaneda's "The Teachings of Don Juan", or better, an episode of Kafka's Josef K.. Besides Buckley's emotional state in this adventure, one wonders what kind of chemical state he was in.

Is This the Sticker?

(Cf. *Macbeth*, Act 2, Scene 1, lines 31-64)

Go, sound my chick to hip me when my juice is ready.
I'll be straight when she knocks the gong.
And you, make your sack and cool.

The Hip Ghan

He said, "Baby, the instrument of all India which I dig the music the most of,
that swings my soul up in that great cathedral head of beauty is the music of the ..."
(*scat song interval*)
He said, "...the *spinnin'* wheel, baby.
(*scat song*) ...knock a little patch on the cat's pants...
(*scat song*) ...swing a coat on grandma...
(*scat song*) ...get a little juice on the table...
(*scat song*) ...swang up get a little circus money...
(*scat song*) ...He said, "The *spinnin'* wheel, baby.
I hope I didn't – bring you *down*."

Marc Antony's Funeral Oration

My ticker is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And, yea, I must stay cool 'til it flippeth back to me.

Religion

Like I 'splained to you before I'm a people worshipper.
I think people should worship people. I really do.
I went out looking for God the other day and I couldn't pin him.
So I figured if I couldn't find him I'd look for his stash.
His Great Lake of Love that holds the whole world in gear.
And when I finally found it I had the great pleasure of finding that people were
the guar-*dians* of it. Dig that.
So with my two times two is four,
I figured that if people were guarding the stash of Love known as God, then
when people swing in beauty they become little gods and goddesses.

And I know a couple of them myself personally.
I know you do, too.
I think people should worship people.

I like to worship somethin' I can *see*,
somethin' I can get my *hands* on,
get my *brains* on.

I don't know about that *Je-hovah* cat!
I can't reach him...

Horse's Mouth

When you stop to think about laughter, it truly is religious. It gives off
vibrations from the subconscious, it swings, it sounds from the subconscious.

When a person is laughing he's illuminated, he's illuminated in the full beauty
of a human being.

Supermarket

What a great thing it is to be alive.
My Lords. My Ladies.
Would it embarrass you very much if I were to tell you that I love you?
It embarrasses you, doesn't it?

© 2010 Allen Schill, except for quotations of Lord Buckley. All rights reserved in all countries.
No part of this document may be reproduced or used in any form without prior written
permission from the author.

For all your Lord Buckley needs, just go to:

http://www.lordbuckley.com/LBC_Home/LBC_Home.htm