

HOWL, The Movie

by Bill Gaston

January 15, 1991, the morning of the U.N. deadline.

I wonder why so many of the best minds of my generation have lost their heads.
I wonder if these feelings that the world is cascading down at last is because I read the Nostradamus said it would, and right now.
I wonder if the end of the Berlin Wall was a tease.
I wonder if print will survive.
And I'm wondering that maybe this isn't proper poetry and that maybe I should be using fancier words here and images which tease as concretely as the Berlin Wall.
I'm wondering if poets should get off its obscure ass for a change - though maybe it's burned in one bridge by confusing too many people for too long.
I wonder if Ginsberg in fact wrote Howl because he was Jewish or American.
And I wonder if Bush learned from Reagan that cinema and time has reduced a nation to role playing at last.
I wonder if they watched the same movies as boys.
And I wonder if we will forgive.
I wonder if there is one of all in this particular movie: an 'us', as in 'us and them'.
And you have to wonder if that word, 'us', isn't the root of the evil we're talking about. In that both these words - us, them - sketch borders as least as tangible as Orwell's.
I'm wondering if I would be this nervous if I didn't have children.
And I'm wondering why I don't get as nervous for everybody else's children, those in Jordan for instance, or in rural Tennessee.
And of course I wonder if that isn't a root problem too.
I wonder if I laughed or not a year ago when a Texan acquaintance of mine made a Jewish joke and called them sand niggers.
I wonder if a war so calculated shows a higher degree of civilization than a spontaneous bare-up or a murder of lover's passion or for that matter a hockey fight.
And I wonder how it is that a desire for ones country to not be at war can be construed as unpatriotic.
Who can help but wonder. But many people, including old friends of mine, aren't wondering much at all except perhaps about their wallets.
I wonder if in not worrying about my own wallet I am proving my own impracticality, showing that like other poets, I am a dinosaur whose eye is fixed on metal things.
But I can't help wondering at such trivia as an edition of The French Lieutenant's Woman I saw which had Meryl Streep's name in typeface larger than John Fowles'.
I wonder how it came to be that movies legitimize books, as TV news does a government's view.
I wonder who will decide for us which facts are not important.
I wonder why poetry, even Allen Ginsberg's has gotten so obscure.
It's a wonder more leaders didn't get involved with the TV screen before now.
I wonder if anyone will care that this isn't essentially poetic, and, if they do care, why.
I'm wondering why repetition is poetic, or mantric, or catatonic, or whether it's merely a forgivable conceit.
I wonder if repetition is what forgives war.
And of course war's poetry is also a cause for wonder.
I wonder to what extent I am ready to be passively entertained by this war, and whether I should be screaming at myself because of this.
I wonder how many people Allen Ginsberg was responsible for influencing into Buddhism and making them passive at a time like this.
I wonder if this poem will have the blindest effect on anybody. That is, I wonder at the old sad notion that the only ones who'll read this poem in the first place are the ones who already agree. As at a peace rally - the ones who need to hear the speeches aren't even there. So is this just a pep talk? Is this just creating a stronger sense of us? and them?

I wonder if everybody, not just me, can see 'them' in the mirror.
I wonder if while you are reading this, I might be watching the war on TV.
I wonder if when children watch news coverage of the war, they will wonder if it's being staged, or not. I wonder if they will bother asking.
I wonder if they will know the difference. Or if we will.
I wonder, though this is romantic and corny in the old fashioned poetic way, whether there are two look-alike soldiers out there, but on different sides, and I wonder whether their hunger, or their blood-born honesty, or their pride, differs at all at all.
I wonder, when I hear relatively good minds justify a warring world, whether or not the bomb isn't really the human brain.
I wonder if there are now people living between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers who are less nervous than me.
It's wonderful, in the literal sense of the word, that the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, the cradle of civilization, might also be the crypt.
I wonder if the word 'wonder' has lost its power, both in this poem and in our language.
I wonder who will make new language for us now that poets are no longer read.
I wonder what it's like to die while part of a large group all dying at once.
I wonder if since the onset of TV people feel more, or less, connected to one another.
I wonder if history repeats itself partly as a result of children not reading their father's poems.
I wonder if the war will overtake the Superbowl in the ratings this year, and I wonder if those few troops left stationed in Europe will have a choice of what they watch.
How much does CNN charge for advertising, and will any oil companies vie for time there in the coming weeks. I wonder.
I wonder what they tell U.S. troops why the war is being fought and I wonder how many would go home if given the choice. I wonder if they're right in saying that fear of cowardice is the biggest fear one encounters in war.
I wonder how many reporters will have a sense of humour. I wonder if I will prefer those who do.
I wonder if I shouldn't feel comforted that not just Nostradamus but also the Bible, and the prophecies of Shambhala and even the common sense of political scientists predicted a war at this time, which is to say, as the desert people put it, It Is Written.
I wonder at the Pentagon's change of the term 'body bag' to 'human remains pouch', because the strategy is not as obvious here as it usually is.
And of course you have to wonder if, since the Pentagon knows Iraq's best weapon is any mention of these pouches coming home, they simply will not tell us.
And I wonder if they won't be right in doing so.
I wonder how vocal I should be in my opinion that nothing is black and white anymore.
I wonder how much my opinions will change under the constant bombardment of information, undertaken by specialists in its delivery.
I'm wondering if any Iraqi soldier thinks like me.
I wonder at his strange fate of having to disobey such a man, and die, or obey such a man, and die.
I wonder at their expression, God Is Good, God Is Good, God Is Good.
I'm wondering too at the fact that both sides do believe that God is on their side, and I go on to wonder whether this fact might not be the perfect marriage of comedy and tragedy.
I wonder if they will keep it tasteful or if they will show the limbs, and the children.
You can't help but wonder who will decide this.
I wonder if Allen Ginsberg will be watching TV, and whether he might see, in one of the countries wired up for this, some ancestral blood relative limp past on the smoky screen, mouth wide open, making sounds Allen can only guess at.

Editor's note: In accordance with the request of Mr. Steve Griffiths the stylized MEAT logo which he created will no longer appear in this section. I regret that he feels the way he does, but in no way regret having published the material which prompted him to make this request.

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