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Letter 1970, April 6, James Tate to Gene DeGruson

James Tate

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6 April 1970

Dear Gene,

It did seem like an awfully long time since I had heard from you, I was wondering I got nothing more personal than ~~the~~ library newsletters, though I have indeed enjoyed them--your words for/about Edsel, etc. It all sounds strange and Ozark gothic, that business with Hank Spruce. My simple advice is this: don't worry about legal threats and suits, get your hands on the manuscripts or at least somehow surrepticiously get as much xeroxed as possible, because that dolt would as soon burn the whole lot if he thought a single incriminating word existed in the papers. Poor Edsel. It's bad enough to be living in that degradation without the double embarrassment of dying in it. I guess that's the cut most of us fear secretly.

No I haven't been to Missouri yet; I am leaving tomorrow for a three day session at Christian College, in Columbia, Mo. The reading is at 3 on Friday. The rest of the time is packed with eleven class meetings, a formal lecture, as yet unprepared, Thursday evening, autograph parties, school convocations, etc. --all in all an ungodly schedule. I will go to KC for Saturday and Sunday, to my mother's in Overland Park. Of course it would be good to see you, but I expect it's impossible.

Then I have four readings when I return--Tufts, Bristol, Wheaton and the Guggenheim. Then April 26th I head back for the midwest for a week of readings and talks to high school students and teachers in Des Moines, I fully expect to be lynched, a very rabid, reactionary town as you may know. That will be through May 1st. Then school is over at Columbia sometime around mid-May, and I have numerous alternative plans for the 3 or 4 months that follow, nothing certain, nothing money-making, that much is certain! I of course want to again leave the country for further wanderings, but will not know the feasibility of that hope until the last minute. I am invited to read at a Conference of Communist Writers to be held in Yugoslavia the last week of August; they will only pay my expenses from the time I hit Europe: I could be payed in full, in other words, from London and back to London, but not from Boston. It sounds terrific, held in a Medieval monestary somewhere in the north on a cliff above the Adriatic. Drunken Bulgarian hiaku writers! Yes yes I will go. So, If I am able to make it that far, perhaps this time I will get to Budapest and Warsaw and other Balkan spas.

The Oblivion Ha-Ha should be arriving soon, like within a couple of days. I have finished another manuscript, 50 poems, which I am sending soon to Black Sparrow. It's about eighty pages, it includes Amnessa People. I of course would like to think it is the best book I've done, but who knows. There is a fair amount of what I think truly deserves the title 'experimental' hopefully in the best sense of that vague word. The book is called: SOME OF THE POSSIBLE CREATURES HAVE GOTTEN FREE. The title comes from a poem by Gunnar Ekelöf, which ends:

"So we shadows are seized by a strange unrest,
when something tells us that people have left,
that some of the possible creatures have gotten free."

What has happened to the Little Balkans Publishing Company? I had hoped the pamphlet would not get tied up in the usual publishing confusions. Is it still coming? When???

Here are some other small publications: Pym Randall Press is bringing out in a week or so a one-poem pamphlet of Deaf Girl Playing. It will be expensive, like 5 or \$7, I will send you one as soon as I get them, but if you want more for any reason you know their address. The Ferguson Press, also Cambridge, is bringing out soon, within a couple of months, a 3-poem pamphlet, in boards, also probably expensive, like 10 or 15 dollars, called Wrong Songs: the poems in it are, Breathing, The Distant Orgasm, and one I think you haven't seen called Two-Hundred-and-One, all 3 poems concern listening to women. I am really happy about this little booklet, though I am getting sick and weary of these prices people are placing on these limited editions. I promise I am about through with this sort of thing. I like the idea of very limited publications, but can't approve of cattering solely to dealers, and not readers, which is obviously what everyone is doing these days. It wouldn't be so bad if the poets got a nice slice of the profits, but alas this is rarely true. I was paid a total of \$214 for Shepherds of the Mist. I know he is a small press, and contrary to what most people might think John Martin is not getting wealthy off these books. He lives entirely on less than \$6000 a year, but puts most of the money right back into the press. Still, I did sign 450 copies!! and you'd think I'd come off a little better than I did.

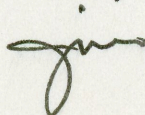
I have been thinking this money business over lately. I never get paid a respectable fee, rarely at least, for reading, but what I resent most is the treatment publishers serve out to their poets. Especially big publishers like the Atlantic. So I have decided I am going to make a stink with my next book with them. Honestly Gene, I have never been able to pay the simplest bills since my stay in Boston, which is albeit a damned expensive city. So it's not arrogance but sheer self-respect that has driven me to the point of demanding a large advance for my next book with them, I don't know how much yet, but I think maybe \$2500. For the Oblivion Ha-Ha I got \$250!!!! Jesus, they paid the photographer a \$100 for one picture of me to put on the back!!! And I only get \$250 for three years work! Something's wrong there.

Unicorn is doing a few small things of mine also, a postcard, a broadside, and maybe a one-poem fold-out, but I have already made it clear to him that I would not be party to his criminal pretentions. The postcard is The Immortals; the broadside is Nobody Goes to Visit The Insane Anymore; the fold-out is Apology for Eating Geoffrey Movius's Hyacinth, a serious poem of some ambition, I do hope you'll like that one.

Good luck with income tax drudgery. The \$400 will of course be a great boon, but I don't want to take it from you if it will be too crippling.

Well, Gene I hope all is well. Please keep in touch. Maybe I will see you soon! Did I send you a copy of the vita I made up, the new one?

Yours,



Gen: Christian College just called + informed me that
 The major reading would be Thursday Night - not Friday afternoon.

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VIA AIR MAIL

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