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THE SMOKESTACK GNOSTIC: A SERMON FOR THE UNCONSULTED

Brother Cinder (pseudonym)

APOCALYPSE CULT

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THE MAKER OF THE TOWN

Hear this, you who were not consulted.

Before the town there was a valley, and in the valley there were people, and they were not happy, for nobody is; but their days were their own. They rose when the work required and stopped when it was done, and no one had yet thought to count the hours and sell them back.

And there came into the valley a Maker. He was not God. Remember this, for the whole of my sermon hangs upon it. He was not God, and he did not know that he was not.

He was a power of the second rank, begotten of a mistake, as the old books say: the offspring of a Wisdom that reached too far and brought forth something without form. He could not see above himself. He looked up and saw only the underside of his own ceiling, and he said, I am the highest thing there is. There is no purpose but mine.

And he made a town. He laid out the streets in rows, that the people might be counted. He built the houses alike, that none should think himself particular. He set the works in the midst of it, and over the works a great chimney, and he was pleased, for it was orderly and it was his.

I do not say he was evil. I say he was a craftsman, and a craftsman loves what he has made, and does not ask it how it feels.

THE RULERS OF THE GATES

Now the Maker could not be everywhere, and he appointed rulers under him. The old books name seven, and call them archons. We had other names for them.

There was the Timekeeper, who sat at the gate with a book, and to whom your morning belonged from the moment you passed him. There was the Foreman, who had been one of us and was so no longer, and hated us for remembering. There was the Rent Man, who came on Fridays. There was the Storekeeper, in whose ledger your wages were spent before you had them. There was the Doctor, who was paid by the Maker and found you fit. There was the Schoolmaster, who taught your children the virtues of punctuality. And there was the Minister, who told you on Sunday that all this was ordained.

Each kept a gate, and you could not pass from one part of your life to another but by his leave.

And here is the cunning of it. Not one of the seven believed himself a ruler. Each thought that he was only doing his job. The Timekeeper did not make the hours; he merely wrote them down. The Foreman did not set the rate; it came from above. Ask any one of them who was responsible and he would point upward, and the one above would point upward, until you came to the Maker, who looked up and saw the underside of his own ceiling.

That is what is meant by a world made in ignorance. It is not that someone is cruel. It is that no one is in the room.

THE SPARK

But the old books say a further thing, and it is the reason I am standing here.

They say that when the Maker fashioned his people, something got into them that he had not put there. A spark, the books call it, fallen from above, from the place he could not see. He did not know it was there and could not have used it if he had.

You know what I mean. You have felt it.

It is the part of you that the job had no use for. The works wanted your back and your eight hours. It did not want the tune you whistled, or the thing you made in the shed, or what you thought about on the walk home. It did not want your opinion of the sunset. These were not on the docket. And because the Maker had no use for them he took them to be nothing.

They are not nothing. They are the only part of you that is not his.

Every man who ever kept pigeons, or grew a marrow for the show, or read a book on his dinner hour with the oil still on his hands, was tending the spark. He did not call it that. He called it having something of his own. It comes to the same.

THE WHISTLE STOPS

Now I will tell you a mystery.

The Maker has gone. One morning the whistle did not sound, and the gates were chained, and the seven rulers stood about with nobody to rule, and it was discovered that they had been in the same prison all along and had mistaken their keys for freedom.

You would suppose that this was the deliverance. The books promise that the power of the rulers shall be broken and the captives go free. And you looked about you and said, Is this it? For you were not free. You were only unemployed.

Hear me. The departure of the jailer is not the opening of the door. A man may sit in a cell for years after the lock has rusted through, because he has forgotten that he ever lived anywhere else. The Maker built his town in the valley. He also built it in you. The second is still standing.

WHAT IS TO BE KNOWN

The old teachers did not say that we are saved by labour, or by obedience, or by patience. They said we are saved by knowing. And what we must know they put in a few questions, which I give you as they gave them.

Who were we? What have we become? Where were we thrown? Where are we going?

Answer them for yourself. I will tell you how I answer.

We were people whose days were our own. We became hands. We were thrown into a town that was built to count us. And we are going, if we have the wit, back to what the Maker never wanted and so never spoiled: the tune, the shed, the thing made for nothing.

Do not go looking for the men who did this to you. I say it again, for I know your hearts. There is no room where they sit. If you seek a face to hate you will find one, and it will be the wrong one, and you will have built the Maker a new town with your own hands.

He was blind. That is all. He made a world without asking, and it was a poor one, and it is finished. What was never his is still yours.

Go home. Tend it.

ABOUT THIS TEXT

TITLE	The Smokestack Gnostic: A Sermon for the Unconsulted
AUTHOR	Brother Cinder (pseudonym)
DATE	1994
TYPE	Pamphlet
PUBLISHER	Slagheap Editions
EXTENT	16 pages, stencil-duplicated, edition of 200
LANGUAGE	English
SOURCE	Set from the first printing. The author's identity is not known to the archive.

Nothing is known about Brother Cinder except what the chapbook implies: that he had read the Gnostic texts in translation with close attention, and that he had worked, or grown up among people who worked, in heavy industry. Slagheap Editions issued perhaps a dozen titles in the 1990s and kept no records that have survived.

The Smokestack Gnostic is a sermon. It takes the myth set out in our primer, Gnosticism and the Prison World, in which a flawed world is fashioned by an ignorant craftsman and administered by his rulers, and maps it point for point onto the company town. The Fullness becomes the life people had before the works. The demiurge becomes the firm. The archons become foremen, timekeepers and rent collectors. The spark is whatever in a worker the job could not use.

As scholarship it is worthless, and it does not pretend otherwise. As a demonstration of why the Gnostic pattern has such a hold on the modern imagination it is hard to improve on. It also illustrates the danger noted in

the primer. A myth that explains suffering by pointing to hidden rulers is one short step from a conspiracy theory, and Cinder, to his credit, sees the step and declines to take it. His craftsman is not wicked. He is blind.

COLOPHON

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