

REINHARDT SLIPS INTO HIS PAINTING: AN EXCERPT FROM *A CATCH OF ANTI-LETTERS*

by Thomas Merton & Robert Lax

Editor's Note: In 1967 Thomas Merton and Robert Lax learned of the death of their Columbia classmate and chum, Ad Reinhardt. He had become a fairly well known artist, gaining attention for his black-on-black paintings. He sent one of these — a painting of a black cross — to Merton. See Lawrence S. Cunningham, "The Black Painting in the Hermit Hatch: A Note on Thomas Merton and Ad Reinhardt," *The Merton Seasonal* 11 (Autumn 1986).

THOMAS MERTON

Sept 5 67

O Lax:

Do you know the great sorrows? Just heard today by clipping from Schwester Therese about Reinhardt. Reinhardt he daid. Reinhardt done in. He die. Last Wednesday he die with the sorrows in the studio. Just said he died in a black picture he daid. The sorrows have said that he has gone into the black picture for he is dead. All I read was the clip. Very small clip. Say Reinhardt was black monk of the pix and he daid. Spell his name wrong and everything. Dead none the less. Tried at first to figure it because the name was wrong maybe it was not Ad Reinhardt who was dead. But all the statements was there to state it. Black monk of the pix. Was cartoons in PM now defunct. The sorrows is true, the surmises is no evade. It is too true the sorrows. Reinhardt he dead. Don't say in the clips how he died, maybe just sat down and give up in front of the black picture. Impossible to believe.

Maybe if Reinhardt had the sense to die quietly in quietist studio it is becoming soon the long procession of big woes and he seen it come.

Maybe the sorrows is coming to roost and to lay the biggest egg you ever did see and he seen the sorrow coming with the egg to lay and he walked off into his picture.

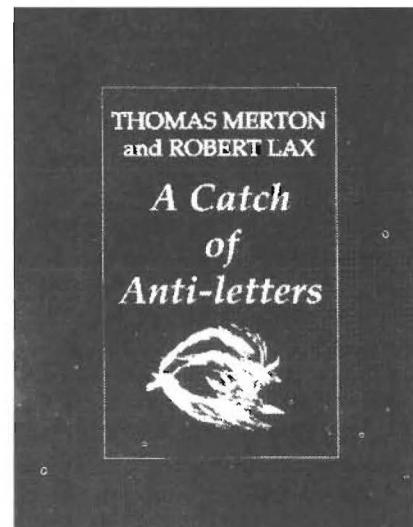
Impossible to believe but is truth nevertheless too much sorrows.

How to grasp with the grapple sorrows? How to understand the excellence of the great squares of black now done in? Glad he was to become the Jews exhibit this year for final success and laurels before the departure. He have this satisfaction how he was in Life think of the satisfaction probably so much it caused death. For to appear in Life is too often the cause of death.

Tomorrow the solemn. The requiems alone

It is all solemn and sad all over beginning to fade out people in process before comes the march of ogres and djinns. Well out of the way is safe Reinhardt in his simple black painting the final statement includes all.

Next thing you know the procession of weevils and the big germ. Pardon the Big Germ in capitals. It is now waking in the labor-blossoms a big pardon Big Germ. Ad is well out of sight in his blacks. It is likely too true the bad fortunes and the sorrows. Gypsy Rose Lee look in her crystal ball and see no more jokes and no more funnies it



is not any more like thirty seven college chums. I must therefore cease and sit in the sorrows. I was not write before because I was in the dump of a sickness. Nothing bad. But you can only daid onct. Like said uncle arthur in the aforesaid. Well is all silence in the den of glooms. Look around at some cheerful flower.

Lv.

ROBERT LAX

Kalymnos Sept 13

Oh Chauncey,

You are right. It is sorrows for old Reinhardt. One could weep with out let for old Reinhardt. The clipping is fall to me from Rice. I read it the last of many letters (offers of millions in every one). I sit near the sea & almost fall into it from sorrow.

& then I sit (as seldom enough we do) in a church & look at the black & grey squares of the tiles, till the spirit is somewhat mended.

& then all through the whole dark night it is Reinhardt. Reinhardt.

(& ever since then.)

not that it could have happened, just that it did.

(& just that it's unthinkable world without him.)

but there is no such world.

one time at a party when a girl was reading palms, he showed us his: his right was the mirror image of the left. what he was meant to be & what he became were exactly the same.

(didn't surprise him much: crazy for symmetries.)

well, it's into the symmetries for us all some day, & from now on dobbin take the hindmost.

Rice saw him about a week before then (looking thin, but ok); he said he had painted one painting; now wanting to make one movie & write one book.

I'm glad you were there in the hermit-cell to say the right kind of liturgy. I've been saying every wrong kind, since the sorrows fell, but I think it will all be heard right.

(everything will be heard right sometime.)

No sargent yelling sit down. is sergeants all over the atmosphere. pressing right into the studiroom, sargents & weevils, & great woes hanging over every infant joy.

Better in the old days (1928), with drinks & a little melancholy, than now with no drinks & great woes everywhere.

& what is this about Gypsy Rose & the crystal ball? is a germ in the crystal ball? Big Germ? a whole long procession of sorrows?

then he was right to slip off into the painting, quiet as sam. quietistic triumphant. samsum agonistes. say us liturgies every one.

Lv,

Lax