

Robert Lax: Tributes and Reminiscences

Likes and Motorbikes

John Beer

One of the things Bob Lax used to say was that if you wanted to find out about yourself, you could start by figuring out the things you liked and the things you didn't like. Some of the things he liked: Noel Coward, Thomas Aquinas, chocolate, cats, Fred Astaire, Jane Goodall, Shakespeare, Mark Van Doren, circuses, gypsies, the sun, the sea.

Some of the things he didn't like: wristwatches, pretension, motorbikes. The first two dislikes go a long way to explaining why he ended up in Greece. The motorbikes got there after he did.

It's harder to think of things he didn't like than things he liked. He couldn't really see the point of Wittgenstein; one day he told me after reading *Remarks on Color*, "You'd think his mom could have told him more about some of this stuff." He liked Simone Weil, though. Bob used a book of her essays as a rough encyclopedia. Anytime a name or idea came up that no one could identify for sure, we'd look it up in Simone's index. Most of the time it was in there.

One story Bob enjoyed telling involved Bob Burford, whom he worked with on *New Story* magazine in the fifties, and who introduced him to Jack Kerouac. At that point, Kerouac was working on *On the Road*, and Bob was finishing *Circus of the Sun*. Burford told Bob, "I think one of you two is going to be the next big thing."

Bob, of course, knew or met just about everyone, from Thomas Edison to Bob Dylan. But I don't think he ever wanted to be more famous than he was. That was one of his secrets: he lived pretty much exactly the life he wanted to live. Anyone could do the same, he'd be the first to insist. It was just too simple an idea to occur to most of them.

John Beer, a poet, served as Robert Lax's literary assistant on Patmos from 1996-98, along with his wife Paula Diaz.