

Savage Amusement Introduction

Early in 1975, I wrote a long letter to a friend, Bob Cantwell, a writer I hadn't seen for ten years. Such a letter becomes autobiographical, and I thought, "If I keep this up, I could have a book." And so I did. I tried to write every day, over the next three months, and I tried to be as honest as I could about what was going on with me, in my life, with those around me, and with my life up to that point. I was aware of the confessional books of some writers and of the self-mythologizing of others. Unconsciously, I think, I wanted to tell the truth in order to become aware of what was real and what wasn't.

I'd already booked myself into a local theatre, for six months later, and that one-man show of satirical characters also explored the question of what's real and what isn't. Incidents in this book led me to my second one-man show, two years later, a satire of a poetry festival, in which some of the characters mentioned or encountered in this book were featured. Satire is a tool in describing what one finds fault with, but this book doesn't take that tone. Most of the people in this story were and remain people I admire and consider friends. We were all in it together. Good satire is about us, not them, and I certainly felt myself worthy of satire, as much as anyone.

The man who wrote this book, at 33, was clumsily trying to sort out his role in the world in which he had chosen to live. His liberal use of alcohol is no longer mine, nor is his use of tobacco or his dependence on desire as a tool for his social and creative life. He was looking around, from within his behavior and the behavior of those around him, to find a way to the heart of his being a creative artist. This is a common path among artists, and the lucky ones go deeper, beneath the surface, into the awareness that remains, like a wise master, at the center of one's fear and foolishness, at peace and smiling, waiting patiently for the masks and the charades to fall away.

My writing is no longer concerned with the search in the world for success in the world, but for what survives the world, in its constancy and its reality. That constant, surviving reality is apparent in this story, if not to the man who wrote it, at least to the man who remembers the man who wrote it. I remember him with regret, remorse, sadness, forgiveness, and a degree of rewarding recognition. I appreciate what he was able to witness, with as much clarity, and with as much compassion as he was capable of, in a time of turmoil and conflict.

Many of those named here have gone on to lives of notable achievement. This is, in a sense, a story of living among extraordinary people, when we were unsure of ourselves, before any of us had any reason to trust ourselves, beyond our circumstances. The signs are there, in all our lives, of our survival and our fulfillment, but we look upon ourselves with clouded eyes when we're trying to be what we have yet to become. There is a core of being, at the center, that gives even the most quixotic existence an instantaneous beauty that turns out to be our lasting reality.

"Savage Amusement" is taken from one of Raymond Chandler's books, but I've been unable to recall where I found it.

Steve Abhaya Brooks