

# AColyte

ASHWEDNESDAY 2019

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College



Come to think of it,  
It *is* a little weird.

## AColyte

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College

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## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Sleeping Off *Mardi Gras*  
Ash Wednesday  
2019

*You have turned my mourning into dancing.*  
--Psalm 30:11

*I could be a Presbyterian because*

- *I love to sing and dance and*
- *I'm not very good at it.*

--2012-13 Majors Intern and lifetime Roman Catholic **Jason Henry**

*Every child has known God,  
Not the God of names,  
Not the God of don'ts,  
Not the God who ever does anything weird,  
But the God who only knows four words  
And keeps repeating them, saying:  
"Come dance with me."*

*Come  
Dance.*  
--Hafiz

Check out this song:

<http://www.lyricsfriends.com/alo/dead-still-dance.php>

The band is ALO (the Animal Liberation Orchestra).

I heard the song on the Contemporary Alternative station on Cable One (Channel 14-818).

Here's what they're singing:

*Body's cold, the party's started, lying in a hole.  
Fertilizer from your skin and compost from your soul.  
And all across the universe, mysterious energies,  
Create more life from your life's left over debris.*

That's an interesting – if a little uncomfortable and ghoulish – way to start a song.

It's not really news, though. We learned this stuff in junior high.

Still, I really like the idea that "mysterious energies create more life from [my] life's left over debris."

You won't be surprised to learn that I think there's some theology there – but it's definitely solid biology as well.

(I have to confess that I'm now tempted to remark that writing a song that begins like this is essentially *composing* about *decomposing*.)

And then the song really gets the attention of those of us in the Professional Christianity business.

*Shadows in the living room, whispers of circumstance.  
Cause somewhere in the afterlife,  
even the dead still dance.  
We dance.  
We dance.*

Interesting. I'm not sure exactly what to make of that.

*Heroes and Villains, whoever's willing  
To bust the thing apart.  
Indecisions and glorious visions  
Gnawing at your heart.  
What were those foreshadows telling you  
In the movie of your life?  
Heroes blinded by usurping  
And willing to sacrifice.*

What are the heroes and villains busting apart?

Coffins?

Notions of the futility and fleetingness of life?

Or notions of the permanence of life?

Better keep listening/reading.

What glorious visions gnaw at your heart?

Notions of fame and fortune and immortality and limitlessness?

What do the foreshadows in the movies of our lives tell us?

“Someday you too will have a funeral”?

*Music in the corridor whispers a hungry trance.*

*Bones and feathers on the floor,*

*Maybe we'll all just dance.*

*Shadows in the living room, whispers of circumstance.*

*Somewhere on the open road even the dead still dance, They dance.*

You know...bones and feathers are all that's left when a cat kills and eats a bird.

Yikes.

“Shadows.”

“Whispers.”

“Maybe.”

*Humbled by the prospects of all that could have been.*

*Sitting in a coffee shop thankful just to grin.*

*Wait for just a moment, just enough to realize,*

*That for most of my existence, I've been hypnotized-*

*By my own sense of glamour, by my own magic rocks.*

*Bending, shaping the ending till it matched up with my thoughts.*

When we're honest with ourselves, we sometimes recognize the difference between what we are and what we could have been.

Sometimes that makes us ashamed.

Sometimes it makes us proud.

On another note:

What do you think about people who sit in coffee shops and just grin? Especially if they're by themselves. Have you ever done that?

And then he realizes that “for most of [his] existence he’s been hypnotized”.

Does that mean he feels that he has been tricked or misled or just been inattentive?

And if he has been tricked or misled, how did it happen?

“[His] own sense of glamour”?

### 1. glam·our

/ˈglamər/

Noun

The attractive or exciting quality that makes certain people or things seem appealing or special: "the glamour of Monte Carlo".

Beauty or charm that is sexually attractive.

“[His] own magic rocks”?

Magic beans?

Crystals?

Rosaries?

Diamonds?

Coins?

And the verse ends as he talks about “bending” and “shaping the ending till it matched up with [his] thoughts.”

I think that means he’s trying to figure out what’s gonna happen when he dies – to find some way to make some sense of his life by gaining some perspective on his inevitable death.

He’s looking for some meaning.

Or some comfort.

Or something.

*Music in the corridor, marking your soul's advance.*

*...Cause even in the afterlife maybe the dead still dance.*

*Shadows in the living room, whispers of true romance.*

*...Cause even in the afterlife maybe the dead still dance.  
We dance.  
We dance.*

Okay, now we've got music.

And "your soul."

Things are getting more nuanced and interesting.

After beginning with tangible, physical, provable descriptions of what happens to a body when it dies, now the song introduces some other elements into this little reflection on death.

And it ends with a timid affirmation:

*Maybe the dead still dance.*

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According to one of my official-looking books from the Presbyterian Church:

*The Lenten journey from the ashes of death to resurrected life begins on the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, which signifies a time to turn around, to change directions, to repent... The first step of the journey calls us to acknowledge and confront our own mortality, individually and corporately... During the imposition of ashes the words: "You are dust, and to dust you will return" are repeated again and again. We are to remember that we are but temporary creatures, always on the edge of death. On Ash Wednesday we begin our Lenten journey through the desert toward Easter.*

That's high-falutin', formal, churchy language – language that's not readily accessible or interesting to everybody in our culture.

"You are dust, and to dust you shall return" is a quote of Genesis 3:19.

The Hebrew word for "dust" is "Adam".

The one imposing the ashes could just as well be saying:

*Body's cold, the party's started, lying in a hole.  
Fertilizer from your skin and compost from your soul.*

But also, always, and at least:

*Even in the afterlife maybe the dead still dance.*

We know we're gonna die.

We're gonna decompose.

We're gonna nourish the vermin.

*("Nourish the Vermin" would actually be a great name for a  
Grunge Band--ED).*

But there are lots of us who think that won't be the end of the story.

That's why lots of members of my tribe geek out about Ash Wednesday.

And Lent.

And Easter.

To quote my recently departed friend the Marginally Reverend Chip Andrus:

*"You are dust.  
And to dancing you will return."*

Maybe he's right.

Maybe the Dead still Dance.

Until Easter, I remain

Just Another Cowboy Preacher

Facing the future with a tapping foot and ashes on my forehead,

JOHN WILLIAMS

Chaplain and Director of Church Relations

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# This Spring in (or near) Wynne Chapel

- Bible Study every Tuesday at 5:30pm in the Moseley Room.
- Worship with Communion every Sunday at 6pm in the Small Chapel.
- Tuesday March 24—Austin College Posey Leadership  
Award Recipient: **María Teresa Kumar**, founding President and CEO of Voto Latino, a leading national civic engagement organization that works to encourage Latino youth to participate in public policy.
- Thursday-Friday March 28-29—Austin College Cunningham  
Lectures: “Contemplative Approaches in Higher Education,”  
**John Dunne**, Distinguished Chair in Contemplative Humanities,  
Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin, Madison)
- Tuesday April 23—Austin College Seder Dinner (Mabee Hall)
- Sunday April 28—Earth Day Worship
- Saturday May 18—Baccalaureate Service (Sid Richardson Gym)