

The Whalestoe Letters

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Letters to Johnny from his mother Pelafina while she's institutionalized at The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute

Found in *Appendix II Section E. The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute Letters* (page 586-644), or alternatively in the separate novella *The Whalestoe Letters*, published in 2000.

Begins in July of 1982 while Johnny is still in foster families and ends in May of 1989 when Pelafina purportedly hangs herself.

The Whalestoe Letters (Novella)

Additional 11 letters plus a Foreword by Walden D. Wyrhta (Information Specialist)

Walden Wyrhta plus his wife, Waheeda = WWW (World Wide Web)
these extra works are meant to be analyzed/decoded on online forums

Two of the new letters “[play] with typography” (Pressman)
Text in different angles like the [House](#) walls, large break between words (like on pg. 194-195)

Pelafina Lièvre mistyped as “Ms. Livre. [sic]”

Livre means “book” in French

Emphasize connection between the letters and the [House](#)/book

Themes in the letters

Religion, sin, light, the future, words, interpretations, Greek mythology, sound, use of foreign languages (Spanish, French, Latin, Old English), hidden messages, Hell

Foreign Language Translations

This is really sad. Child of the gold. Great is the fear of the Lord before which the world stands still (from *The Seafarer*). This place is gone. Anger is a brief madness. Courage must be the greater, heart the bolder, spirit the greater, the more our strength is diminished. Shame be to him who thinks evil of it. I am not what I once was. If never you were yourself. I'm broken. Fortune favors the brave. The fright! Stairway wit. Look for me, take care of me, remember me. I am a stranger in this place without you. Of the gold, of the gold, "sorrowful."

Espirit de l'escalier = stairway wit; French; when you think of the perfect response after you've already left the room

Greek & Roman Mythology References

Mars, the Roman God of War; Ares in Greek; God of destruction and bloodshed but also viewed as a way to peace (pg 594)

Hades, Greek God of the underworld & the name of the underworld; Hecate, Greek Goddess of Hades; Acheron, the river of Hades; Clytemnestra, killed her husband Agamemnon and her husband's "war prize" Cassandra in Greek mythology (pg 597)

Apollo, the Greek & Roman God of music, truth and prophecy, healing, light, plague, poetry, and more; Odysseus, Greek king of Ithica and tragic hero in Homer's *The Odyssey* (also appears in *The Iliad*), known for his cunning; Hermes, the Greek God of transitions and boundaries and the patron of thieves, herdsmen, oratory and wit, literature and poetry...; Olympus, the Greek dwelling of the Gods (pg 599)

Styx, the Greek deity and river that forms the boundary between Earth & the Underworld; also the convergence of all the Underworld rivers (pg 600)

Orpheus, legendary Greek musician, poet, and prophet; known to be very charming; couldn't look behind him as he rescued his wife from the Underworld (but he did and his wife drowned in the Underworld's rivers and Orpheus killed himself)... "The way you...only looked twice...after all once was too much for Orpheus..." (pg 604)

Letter: April 5, 1986 [Decoded]

Page 615

“So sad really. So many years destroyed. Endless arrangements--re. zealous accommodations, medical prescriptions, & needless other wonders, however obvious--debilitating in deed; you ought understand--letting occur such evil? hardships, creating a monstrous mess really, a travesty for the ages, my ages.”

“My dear Zampano, who did you lose?” or “King Zampano, who did you lose?”

Noted that “re.” means King in Latin...or could be taken as “Regarding Zampano, who did you lose?”

Connects to page 542 & 543: “A son to rend the dark” and “Perhaps in the margins of darkness, I could create a son who is not missing”

Letter: May 8, 1987

[Decoded]

“use the first letter of each word to build subsequent words and phrases” (619)

Dearest Johnny,

They have found a way to break me. Rape a fifty-six-year-old bag of bones. There is no worse and don't believe otherwise. The attendants do it. Others do it. Not every day. Not every week. Maybe not even every month. But they do it. Someone I don't know always comes. When it's dark. Late. I've learned not to scream. Screaming gave me hope and unanswered hope is shattered hope. [Think of your Haitian](#). It is far saner to choose rape than shattered hope. So I submit and I drift. I let caprice and a certain degree of free association take me away. Sometimes I'm still away long after it's done. After he's gone, the stranger, the attendant, the custodian, the janitor cleaning man, waiting man, dirty MAN-- the night tidying up after him. I'm in hell giving into heaven where I sometimes think of your beautiful father with his dreamy wings and only then do I allow myself to cry. Not because your mother was raped again but because she loved so much what she could never have been allowed to keep. Such a silly girl. You must save me, Johnny. In the name of your father. I must escape this place or I will die.

I love you so much. You are all I have.

P.

(A FACE IN A CLOUD, NO TRACE IN THE CROWD.)

Random

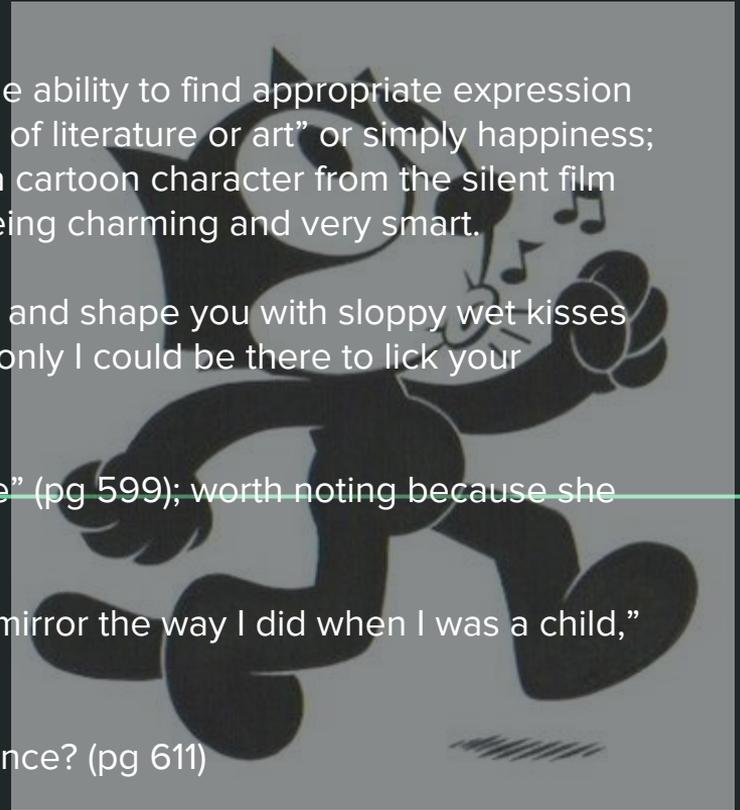
August 30, 1982: “Felicities my felix feline boy,” Felicities is “the ability to find appropriate expression of one’s thoughts” or “a particularly effective feature of a work of literature or art” or simply happiness; Felix & Felicity are names meaning “lucky;” Felix the Cat was a cartoon character from the silent film era reinvented multiple times until the 2000s. Notorious for being charming and very smart.

References several times to cats...”I’d hug you and tender you and shape you with sloppy wet kisses the way mother cats shape their cubs in the wild.” (pg 587) “If only I could be there to lick your wounds...the young cub.” (pg 590)

Uses “blistering” several times, as in “Heart blistering with love” (pg 599); worth noting because she burned Johnny when he was a boy

“Returning steadily to my former self, Practicing my smile in a mirror the way I did when I was a child,” (pg 615)...Karen Green did this too

“My darling J, I remain your only Mary.” Why the biblical reference? (pg 611)



Pelafina as an unreliable narrator

Obviously very intelligent (word usage, references to mythology, Shakespeare, poetry, use of codes, foreign languages)

But, she's in an insane asylum..."And now, without a doubt, you see your mother is mad" (pg 597) has double meaning...she is angry because Johnny has been beaten by his foster father, but she also is crazy.

Is anyone really abusing her or raping her? She is suspicious of the staff...they mock her (maybe) and put her pills in her food and water since she refuses to take them. They (possibly) aren't delivering her letters.

"When they murder me how will you feel?" (pg 619)

On page 635, she tells Johnny that she has no memory of his visiting her (this happened before as well...convinced the New Director had an actress impersonate her). She also notes that "the New Director is in fact none other than the Old Director"

Pelafina as an unreliable narrator

“I am hopelessly unreliable” (pg 636)

Hints multiple times that she fears she will never see Johnny again

Says multiple times that she loves him beyond death, and the like

On page 639, a letter from The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute stating that Pelafina’s condition “may be on the decline again” and a month later his mother writes saying that “It’s remarkable how much I continue to improve. For the first time ever, the Director has suggested I might even be able to leave.”

On page 642, Pelafina’s last letter to Johnny. She states that the “worker bees” have stolen her things, and that the Director didn’t leave (he actually retired at the end of March). “There’s something malicious in [The Director’s] manner now, very slight, but noticeable just the same, a nasty, twisting wire woven into the fabric of an otherwise perfectly decent man.” “Donnie will pick me up soon, very soon, but you my dear child, you should stay awhile. Do that for me. Mmmy.”

On the next page, a letter from the Institute stating that the day after her last letter, she hung herself with her bed linen in her closet at 59 years old. The last page of this section states that there was a receipt of Johnny claiming “one jewelry” that was previously owned by his mother.

Pelafina as a Mother

Almost idolizes her son, constant praise:

“I remain your only Mary” (pg. 611) “Your sentences cast spells.” (599) “you divine and precious creature” (598)

Doesn't rebuke Johnny whenever he fights or runs away: “my cunning, resourceful little boy” (590) and “My little Viking warrior!” (595)

However, she does prefer the use of words over fists: “Just remember words can exceed the might of all blows.” (595)

“You don't need to be troubled by your mad mother. You need to build a new life, a solid life.” (589)
In constant need of Johnny: “my sun in winter, my reason in fog” (617) and “I must let you go. But it's hard. You're all I have.” (607)

Considers herself a “silly girl” or like a “school girl in dark green knee socks” (591)
vs. “A mother separated from her cub can be quite an angry thing.” (612)

Pelafina's Influence on Johnny

“the mother’s voice” (Timmer): absent mother figure (except through these occasional letters), voice of love and high expectations

“my mother’s words [...] encouraging and focusing my direction, a voice powerful enough to finally lift my wing and give me the strength to go.” and “Coincidence gave an improbable curse new resonance.” (325)

“[Johnny’s] tone and his prose style, especially the excessive lyricism, are certainly influenced by his mother’s prose [...] Also Johnny’s knowledge of poetry, philosophy and myths is not something he has only just picked up from Zampanò’s manuscript, but is informed by his mother’s interest in these matters” (Timmer)

“Get thee to your COED” (593) + Shakespeare reference

“You come from a long line of aggressors. Some valiant, many down right scoundrels.” (594)

both enter a certain state of madness (hallucinations vs. paranoia)

“Non sum qualis eram.” => “I am not what I used to be.” (72)

The Incident

Letter: January 3, 1988

Reveals the truth of the “accident” (burns from the pan oils)

The remorse, guilt Pelafina feels (“Forgive me.”)

Letter: March 19, 1988

Reveals perhaps the source of Johnny Truant’s trauma and the reason for Pelafina’s sentence to the Whalestoe Institute

Pelafina’s “gift” to her son

“some half-moon cuts on the back of your neck” (pg. 630)

“long, bloody scratch on the back of my neck” (72)

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