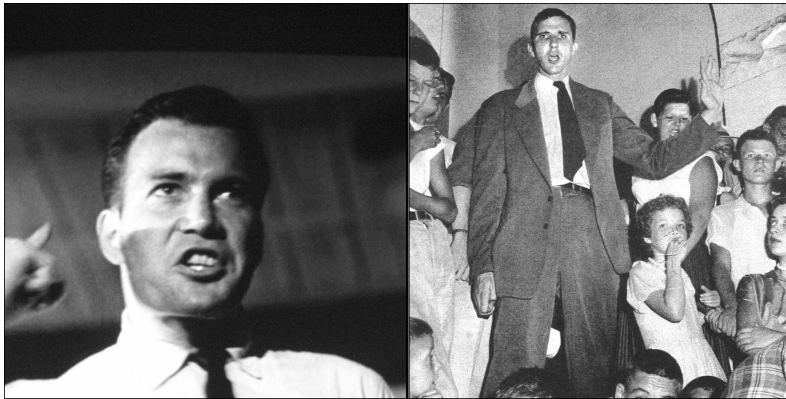


COAL CREEK 10:20, 2016.

Two chapters of research written in 2006 for a documentary to be entitled OUTSIDE AGITATOR. Chapter One is an introductory proposal for a grant to produce the hour-long film. Chapter Two deals with specific people during school de-segregation unrest in the South. In 2016, both chapters became the basis for a more compressed, personal “documation”, COAL CREEK.



The actor William Shatner
in *The Intruder*, 1961

John Kasper, in Clinton,
Tennessee, 1956

CHAPTER ONE: OUTSIDE AGITATOR

A 1950s Greyhound bus pulls into a sleepy Southern town and out steps a young, steely-eyed William Shatner wearing a white suit. He flirts with a little girl and her mother while simultaneously scanning the iconic symbols of American virtue: Main Street, courthouse, small shops, people minding their own business. Long before his TV life as *Star Trek*'s moral compass, Commander Kirk, Shatner's first leading role in a feature film is Adam Cramer, a thinly disguised portrait of the notorious racist, antisemitic rabble-rouser John Kasper.

This 1961 movie is “*The Intruder*,” Roger Corman's only serious film (and reported to be his favorite), shot on a shoestring in a small Indiana town, using B-movie techniques and a cast that included many non-professionals. Despite its hard-hitting, realistic portrayal of the “social problem” of racial integration, and despite its favorable reviews as a serious look at lawlessness in the South as well as for Shatner's complex performance, it flopped at the box office. Re-released variously as “*I Hate Your Guts!*,” “*The Stranger*,” and “*Shame*,” the film-going public never embraced this film with a message.

Another media artifact from this period, the CBS News documentary “*Clinton and the Law*,” traces the events surrounding the Clinton, Tennessee school desegregation crisis of fall, 1956. Produced by Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly, only a few months after the actual disturbances, its methodical pacing,

unvarnished presentations of both sides (including a lengthy speech by the real Kasper), with minimal voice-over narration, seems stoically realistic compared to the infotainment fare of today's TV.

The dramatized Kasper and the documented Kasper bear a stunning resemblance: Both are seductive, educated, cultivated, eccentrically charismatic outsiders who are able to ingratiate themselves with people from all walks of life. Each version of Kasper looks so appealing it's hard to absorb the actual content of his venomous speech, yet many did. Was he the essential catalyst for turning a small East Tennessee town into a chaotic circus of racist mobs, unrelenting psychological torture, beatings, and in 1958, a school bombing? Would Clinton have absorbed its tiny Black minority into its public institutions peacefully without this particular "outside agitator"?

After his disturbances and arrests throughout the South, a one-year prison term for inciting to riot, and a quixotic bid for the U.S. presidency in 1964, Kasper disappeared from public life and died in 1998 without ever writing or speaking about his life. He grew up in New Jersey, graduated from Columbia University, and led a bohemian lifestyle in Greenwich Village where he started a bookstore frequented by free-thinkers, both Black and white, who read little magazines and practiced yoga. But his well-documented protégé relationship with Ezra Pound during the poet's incarceration at St. Elizabeth's psychiatric hospital, and his close friendship with many on the far-right fringe including Asa Carter (the Klansman and speechwriter for George Wallace who recast himself as Forrest Carter, author of "The Education of Little Tree"), American Nazi George Lincoln Rockwell, and Holocaust-denier Eustace Mullins, all suggest an enigmatic, contradictory individual. Truth stranger than fiction.

The story of Clinton's upheaval was erased from national consciousness one year later by headlines from Little Rock, Arkansas, in part because the National Guard was sent in by President Eisenhower, not, as in Tennessee, by a moderate Southern governor. The Clinton drama has a modest, local news feeling with everyone speaking in earnest, twangy accents. It is generally told as a triumphant tale of good white people who wrest control of their town from the forces of bigoted outsiders, of conventional men and women who stand up for the rule of law, and of brave Black children who endured unimaginable stress to achieve a better education and place in life. Memorials such as Clinton's Green-McAdoo Museum (which opened in August, 2006) rightfully honor the bravery of the "Clinton 12," and the disgraced Kasper is long forgotten. Yet his mysterious story still resonates and we forget it at our own risk.

The Clinton narrative may not have been the first use of the term "Outside Agitator" but it was probably the last time it was used to refer to a white racist.

In countless confrontations in the decade that followed, the epithet would be used by the white status quo against organizers from SNCC and SCLC who had come to town to “stir up trouble among our colored people.”

As with Hitler, one can still debate whether Kasper was mad or evil. Was he a pawn, a suicidal “shock trooper” under the malign influence of Pound, the unrepentant fascist and antisemite. Did this well-dressed, articulate 26-year-old really believe in conspiracies of Jews, Supreme Court Justices, and Federal Reserve bankers, or did he use these fantasies to manipulate his audience? Was he just a trouble-maker with authority issues, a kind of hipster (like Marlon Brando in the “Wild One”) who might have transformed into an inspired orator of the Left in the civil rights or anti-war movement had he been born a decade later? It’s true he had disciplinary problems in adolescence, spent time in a mental hospital during high school, and was sent to a military academy before college, then was deferred 4F (mentally unfit) by the draft. Documentary film evidence shows a thoughtful gentleman who could be lecturing a college history class, only the 1956 audience is actually a White Citizens Council in Kentucky, and Kasper is urging disobedience to Federal law to uphold racial purity.

Kasper’s connection to Ezra Pound, from 1951 to 1957, in the period of the great poet’s curmudgeonly incoherence, involved publishing obscure economic conspiracy texts along with reprints of Pound’s work. Their copious correspondence reveals a malleable sycophant eager to impress his master with “poetic” puns, invented spelling, and bilious antisemitism masquerading as humor. Did Kasper push the Futurist stance of Pound from Modernist art credo to direct action? Did the poetic anger of the 1914 “Blast Manifesto” (authored with Wyndham Lewis) and the pro-Axis radio broadcasts finally gain a foothold in Pound’s native land to ignite actual dynamite explosions that destroyed the South’s first successfully integrated high school in Clinton, as well as a school in Nashville, and a synagogue in Atlanta?

THE FILM PROJECT

In addition to the two films from 1957 (CBS Reports) and 1961 (Corman’s feature) which will be a source of historical context, we have interviewed two Clinton residents who were high school seniors in 1956. One is Jerry Shattuck, now a lawyer, who appeared on CBS as the articulate football captain who upheld the rule of law. The other is Alfred Williams, one of the Black students, now a beloved custodian at the Clinton grade school, who reveals that he was scarred to death and really didn’t want to integrate the high school, that race relations were “rotten then” and “still are.” One story describes a triumph of small town citizens and their children, the other reveals the emotional trauma that underlies the triumphant narrative. Other contemporary voices may include Jim Ramsey, a native of Clinton who has been Anderson County Attorney for 30

years; Kasper's Make It New bookstore manager in 1955 (who wishes to remain anonymous); Jack Neely, Knoxville historian and author; and Clive Webb, Professor of North American Studies at the University of Sussex, U.K.

Archival material (stills, graphics, clippings from the national media and the McClung Center for East Tennessee History) will be collaged to create a map of Kasper's campaign. Another visual source will be Kasper's numerous letters to Pound, archived at Yale University's Beinecke Library and Indiana University's Lilly Library, which provide a disturbing psychological portrait in language and concrete typography. The portrait will be personified by an animated Kasper, assembled from photos and drawings in the spirit of the Weimar propaganda artist John Heartfield, to encompass facets of his enigmatic life.

"Outside Agitator" will weave these elements together to present an image and interpretation of a man who cast a terrible spell over people even as he was caught in the snares of his own self-deception.

OUTSIDE AGITATOR CHAPTER TWO (George and Florette at Le Cafe Figaro)

SEPTEMBER 1956

John Kasper was the poster boy of white resistance to school desegregation in the South. The 26-year-old Columbia-educated, soft-spoken 6'4" New Jersey native didn't look like the traditional racist rabble-rouser on the Clinton, Tennessee courthouse steps. He stoked racial fears with crude stereotypes cloaked in the benign context of "states' rights" and "free speech" and urged open defiance of the momentous Supreme Court 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision which was being put into practice by the town school board. Rioting by whites, martial law and occupation by the National Guard caught the eye of the national media as the smirking Kasper flourished his handcuffs in Life magazine. He was acquitted by a local jury and took his campaign throughout the South, making alliances among the Klan, White Citizens Councils and the antisemitic Nazi fringe. As Clinton recovered from lawlessness, elected a moderate mayor, and kept its school on a path to racial integration, Kasper was exposed in the New York Herald Tribune as having been a free-living bohemian bookstore owner from Greenwich Village where he had "dated a Negro woman." This paper also revealed him to be an acolyte of Ezra Pound, the fractious, modernist poet and traitor currently incarcerated in a mental hospital. It wasn't clear which revelation was most confusing to his followers in the South. Before serving two terms in a Federal prison, then fading into self-imposed oblivion for

over thirty years, Kasper inspired bombings of two schools and a synagogue. Without ever publishing a word of explanation, justification or self-analysis, he died in Florida in 1998.

JANUARY 2007

At Florette's suggestion we meet for lunch at Le Figaro, the beatnik landmark at the corner of Bleecker and Macdougall Streets, just across the street from the site of the Make It New Bookstore, where she had worked as Kasper's assistant manager in the early '50s ("even before the Figaro," she chuckled, to establish her chronology). I had called her two months before after discovering her married name on Google and then dialing 411. "How did you get this number?" asked the voice of one who values her privacy, yet, because I had mentioned John Kasper's name up front along with stammered diplomatic apologies, she relented and gave me her email address. She sounded "cultured," "educated," "self possessed," what you would expect from a retired public school teacher. Therein followed a steady stream of correspondence as I tried to explain why I wanted to meet with her. Florette's email style (double-spaced, all caps, seasonally colored fonts, and generically cheerful tone) suggested someone eager to please, yet with a firmly formal reserve. Online I had read a lengthy biographical interview with her covering her life and work, but nothing about her connection to Kasper, a chapter of her young life she clearly wanted to keep concealed. I didn't want to "out" her, yet felt she might hold valuable clues to this enigmatic character.

Florette had alluded to a "muscular-skeletal" condition that hindered her mobility, so when she said we would be joined by her doctor, I imagined a wheelchair and constant monitoring by an attending specialist. Jean turned out to be her close friend since high school, who had often subbed for Florette at the bookstore, and is now retired. The quieter of the two, Jean introduced key concepts at pivotal junctures in the free-wheeling chatter: her early discovery and disapproval of Kasper's politics, her reminder that the mid-1950s experienced the renewal, not the beginning, of the civil rights movement, and that Kasper's personality was "chameleon-like."

Florette, now 70 years old, has curly brown hair impeccably streaked, make-up applied so well as to be invisible; her stylishly rectangular, red-framed glasses set off a smiling face. She twinkles. On the phone she had spoken in measured tones of how she had merely used Kasper to meet Ezra Pound: all very calculating. Now, at the table, she bubbles volubly about coming to the Village as a teenager, modeling clothes that her mother made for her, working part-time in a bank, dance classes, even meeting Charlie Parker! She shows her modeling

portfolio of poses and fashion from the '50s to the '90s, from svelte gamin, sporting curve-obscuring abstractions to wholesome pin-up girl in bikini, all the way to authentically Afro'd grandma. The color prints have faded but the winning smile remains, developed and fixed decades before by this self-confident, optimistic, striving woman.

A brief sketch of her multi-faceted life would include her father of French/Antiguan descent, who was an air-traffic controller during WWII, and her own education at Catholic academies, Brooklyn public schools, and St. Johns and Fordham Universities. In addition to her teaching both here and in Mexico, modeling and acting in TV commercials, she had a long career working the reservations desk for Pan American Airlines, where her trilingual skills were surely prized. A long marriage to an NBC producer, raising a family, and most recently producing a show for Brooklyn Community Access TV suggests a fulfilled, happy, and productive life.

Florette gives a virtuoso performance of remembrance. She and Jean both saw Kasper as a true free spirit, modest, easy-going, engaged with Black art and music (she remembers he introduced her to Leadbelly's music and loved to dance at parties). Kasper was friends with creative African Americans in the Village such as Ted Joans and the dancer Ned Williams; he was briefly referenced in LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka's 1957 "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note" ("Oh, I knew John Kasper when he hung around with shades..." i.e. slang for Negroes, not sunglasses). She doesn't actually say it but Kasper must have been deeply attracted to Florette's beauty, intelligence and straight-laced demeanor; he wanted to "educate" her.

At the same time, Kasper had been undergoing a transformative education of his own. He had a troubled, rebellious suburban childhood in Camden, NJ, where his father (an MIT-educated engineer specializing in "combustion") and mother attended the Bible Presbyterian Church, headed by the fundamentalist, anti-communist radio preacher, Carl McIntyre. Discipline problems followed him from military academy in Georgia to two years at Yankton College in South Dakota where he was described as a "troublemaker with pronounced left-wing sympathies." There was a brief stay at a mental hospital and a military draft classification of 4F (unfit). Then came his final two years at Columbia University where he earned a BS in the General Studies program, but not before falling, somehow, under the spell of Ezra Pound. At Columbia, Kasper took Babette Deutsch's modern poetry course and made a scene by angrily contradicting his teacher's comment that one could appreciate Pound's poetry but dislike his fascist politics. Then, like many others, the 22-year-old wrote a formal introductory letter throwing himself obsequiously at the feet of the famous poet.

May 15, 1951, "It is with extreme reluctance that I write this letter...one is reluctant indeed (especially a schoolboy) to bother a man whose every minute is invaluable for what I believe to be one of the greatest creations of genius that has appeared in the history of the world.

I speak of the Cantos, and what they have meant to me." And so on, for 3 single-spaced, perfectly typed pages.

By the third letter,

June 6, 1951, "I'm going to buy a printing press..."

By June 22, after two more lengthy letters dealing with Pound's self-promotion, publishing projects, and New York friends, Kasper finally breaks with formal writing conventions and edges closer to the rambling, free-associative, "messy" style Pound used for all correspondence: no indents, words x'd out, corrections appearing in scribbly script, invented spelling (Enny-way, damn in 'est'd), signed simply "Kasper." Even the typewriter carriage slips to make slanted lines of text if to reflect the Blast Manifesto typography of Pound's rebellious Vorticist colleague, Wyndham Lewis.

July 9, 1951 begins, "Lustrous Prince:"

July 10, 1951, "Master: Tanks fer the reproach, but Keerist ! yu don't think I DID menshun Verdi & Vivaldi in the same breath do ya?" One can only imagine the master's scolding. Then relating his visit on Pound's behalf to the composer William Schuman, then president of Juilliard School of Music:

"Yu must come to accept, that at Jewyard, it don't hurt to talk Grampaw and Aunt Olga (Pound's mistress Olga Rudge) at the same time / if I don't they do / they's genuinely in'ested in EZ it seems." Here is the first smattering of "humorous" antisemitism, mingled with a kind of illiterate hillbilly dialect as if to imply that he is merely assuming this cartoon persona to amuse his master. But in retrospect one suspects that Kasper, by miming Pound's helter-skelter word play, is also signing-on to a kind of secret war against American culture and politics. The ideology driving this war was incubated in numerous sessions (an ad hoc "ezravercity") held in Pound's spacious quarters or on the grounds of the hospital where, joined by David Horton, Eustace Mullins, George Lincoln Rockwell, and others steeped in antisemitic, Neo-Nazi conspiracy theory, he held forth with witty banter.

Were it possible to summarize Pound's message the result would be a crazy quilt including Chinese ideograms, outdated biological theories of Louis Agassiz, his

own “Cantos” as well as the totality of Western Literature and Art, and, most importantly, the monetary conspiracies revealed by Alexander Del Mar in the late 19th Century attacking the Hamiltonian tradition of a central bank, the Federal Reserve. This core of this esoteric critique is the “The Jew” who, beginning with usury, through financial disasters and both world wars, and now, closer to home, is funding the emerging movements for racial equality to destabilize our white supremacy and turn America into a Communist state. None absorbed this message as zealously as Pound’s adept, factotum, and crusader. To be sure the visiting schedule also included a wide assortment of allies, established scholars, poets, and artists, as well as young sycophants eager for his artistic/literary guidance, who did not participate in Pound’s political curriculum.

There followed two years of publishing and promotional activities on Pound’s behalf culminating in the October 1953 opening of “Make It New,” the title of Pound’s 1935 collection of his essays. It had long been, and continues to be, the mantra of the avant-garde. Within a year Kasper hired Florette.

On May 18, 1955, Kasper writes Pound, “Toward employing the 1 for 1 strategy, you may know that J.K. has organized some Afro-American vitality to break the Jew-grip. Bulleeve me Sir, they understand EVERYTHING and you don’t have to use words, they are DOWN for YOU, Grampaw, and why, anyway should 14,000,000 Nubians be left to the Baruchcrats?”

“Flo, in particular, is the best bet for Make It New to appear on the scene. She is Catholic, a collitch girl, attended St. John’s in Bklyn, is quite intelligent and ‘digs’ the red question, the yidd question, and is working on le probleme de moneta. She keeps the shop open 6 days a week from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m...She has much less of the African tendency to run off into hedonism than most, though is an expert on what is instinctively good about modern jazz (always goy) and repulsively bad, (always yitt). Her fiancé is a serious cat now studying architecture at Howard U. in Vashington.”

Kasper writes of himself in the third person; employs slurs like “Jew-grip” to concur with Pound’s invariable focus on the primary cabal sapping the nation’s strength; slips in “humorous” invented spellings like Baruchcrats (Bernard Baruch, the famous liberal philanthropist was a presidential advisor at the time.) as ominous non-sequiturs; self-consciously drops-in hipster argot; relies on archaic words like Nubians in sly irony; suggests a mystical, supra-linguistic communication mode (“you don’t have to use words”) with African Americans; and relates virtually everything back to a Manichean worldview obsessed with Jews — all this to mimic and please his surrogate father, his “Gramp” who returns the compliment by nicknaming him “Kasp”, “Gasp”, “Der Kasper!” (the erudite poet’s allusion to the 17th Century German, shape-shifting puppet

character). At the end of the letter he pops the main question: “And wd D.P. (Pound’s wife Dorothy) or anyone be too upset if I brought Flo out?” Thus does he resort to unambiguous, conventional language to establish his boundaries, to prevent any unpleasant scenes: May I bring a Negro to meet you? I know it will be difficult, but I hope nobody will be “too upset.” Clearly the master/apprentice relationship still must conform to social protocol in this free-wheeling epistolary badinage.

Florette shows me snapshots taken on this visit to St Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, the Federal asylum for the insane where Pound had already been held for 10 years to avoid a treason trial. Kasper (“in his only suit,” she chuckles) is gallantly taking the hand of Florette who is exquisitely decked out in a grey suit, hat, heels and white gloves, in front of a park fountain—a fashion shot for the 21st Century. “I looked just like a young Condoleeza,” purrs Florette. Jean snaps, “Yech. Don’t even mention that woman’s name.”

I am now hearing real people confronting their past and present, with thrilling measures of embarrassment and dismay. Up till now I had only read Kasper’s letters preserved in the vast Pound collections at Yale and Indiana University. Even though Pound’s letters to Kasper are missing, letters to other correspondents readily suggest Kasper’s mimicry of the vivid Pound style. Kasper’s letters, typed and free-hand, deal at times with the tedious business end of publishing. There is also much gossip about academics, poets and writers, mutual friends, potential supporters, many dismissively laced with references to their deterministic ethnicity, often in toxic, vulgar slang.

FLO KNOWS

Lunch has entered an awkward phase. Florette must re-order because the pepper shaker, its cap mysteriously unscrewed, has dumped its entire contents on her omelet. Jean has left for an appointment, so now it’s just the two of us. The café seems to have emptied. Then a cockroach scuttles across the table. (Le Figaro has since closed).

I discuss the documentary film I would like to make. It would include an interview with her and other people who were either active players fifty years ago or who may offer some insight from their academic perspective. But without any foundation or other backing, my project must seem confusing, experimental, perhaps too personal. Why should she participate? It may show her acting the foolish girl, the innocent, or even as the race betrayer. She isn’t sure of my motives. Neither am I.

While waiting for her ride, Florette confides that there is much more she hasn’t told me about Kasper, implying that it would have to wait. Had they been

intimate? Without even asking, she had stated up front that she had a boyfriend at the time, and Kasper had numerous girlfriends (“all very pretty”). Of course, later the ‘50s press had played up the likelihood of an interracial affair by describing their relationship as “dating.” Kasper had shown photos of black G.I.s kissing European women to enrage the natives of Clinton in 1956, showing what they could expect in their newly integrated high school. Then in a 1957 trial in St. Petersburg, Florida, Kasper had admitted that he had actually danced with a Negro (it was Florette). Photos taken at the bookstore showed Kasper in a group of Black and white, men and women, all in a jovial mood (photo taken by Florette). Clearly Kasper’s later notoriety caused her and her friends much confusion and pain, which continue to this day. Did she know how she (her photos, her relationship to him) had been used to discredit Kasper among the racists? While working in the bookshop, had she understood the implications of his antisemitism?

“HOW DID YOU GET THIS NUMBER?”

I don’t know exactly how to push Florette into telling more. I’m not a professional reporter eagerly sniffing out an exclusive background story of 50-year-old events which never reached beyond the context of an obscure regional flare-up in East Tennessee on the path toward Little Rock, Birmingham, Selma, King, Black Power, Vietnam, Nixon, the “Southern Strategy”, Bush, and Obama. Besides the thrill of reading musty little magazines (Commentary, the Nation, the Reporter) and insightful reporters (David Halberstam, Wilma Dykeman, David Rattray, James Rorty), what is my attraction to the Kasper/Pound/Clinton story? Is it a window onto my own cloudy, ambivalent adolescence, protected from the nascent turbulence of a race-defined region in a period of mass conformism and psychological repression? And where does Florette fit in? Does her experience with Kasper represent for her a kind of experimental, youthful indiscretion, or did she unwittingly sign on to his crusading ideology? Kasper’s letters to Pound contain lies and fantasies about his Southern campaign; perhaps his glowing descriptions of Florette are also projections of his own conflicted sociopathic neuroses.

And what of my own projections? Am I a kind of cyber-stalker, rooting about in the distant past for comparative psycho-sexual histories to analyze Kasper’s quixotic, aberrant behavior? Among the women in Kasper’s Greenwich Village life is Sheri Martinelli, the legendary free-spirited, drug-addled painter, one of Pound’s amours, who needed constant nursing. Another is Stephanie Dudek, a Reichian therapist with whom Kasper had a tempestuous, at times violent relationship. In a recent email to me Dudek referred to Kasper as a “lost soul...a lost child...deluded, angry and looking for someone to blame.” Kasper’s launched-on-a-shoestring-bookstore story would be familiar to anyone who has read “Kafka Was The Rage,” the saucy memoir of the same Village bohemian era

by literary critic Anatole Broyard, whose own racial secret (“passing”) wasn’t revealed until after his death. After Kasper retired from public life he married at least twice and fathered at least one child out of wedlock (she appears to be barely aware of her father’s history, yet eager to establish him on-line as a “great American leader”). His last six years were spent married to Tram Huong Kasper, a North Carolina restaurant chef of Vietnamese descent, who wrote me that she knew little of his history.

Another projection onto the flickering mythic image of Kasper comes from one Robert S. Griffin (no relation), a tenured professor at the University of Vermont and self-published “white nationalist” who cherry-picked facts and opinions about Kasper for a hagiographic treatment on his website, which in turn formed the basis for the John Kasper entry on Wikipedia. It has been edited for details like grammar but remains at best an evasion.

REPRESSION AND AGGRESSION

The mysterious disappearance of Pound’s letters has vexed scholars and amateur sleuths alike. Did Kasper store them in a box as evidence of his decade-long relationship with one of the pre-eminent poets of his century, only to have them stolen, consumed by fire, carelessly or intentionally discarded after his death? After he responded to each of Pound’s letters did he trash them — an act of bohemian insouciance? Did Pound relentlessly stoke his acolyte’s quixotic crusade or try to distance himself from the racist rabble-rouser in order to facilitate his release from incarceration, as his allies urged? Did this period in Kasper’s young life come to represent for him a shameful, best forgotten experience, as it had for Florette?

Kasper’s racial volte-face in the South was accompanied by public effusions on the strength, intelligence, and high moral character of the white mountain folk of East Tennessee, the same hillbillies he had disparaged so comically in his letters to Pound. He simply gave the crowd what it wanted to hear. And Kasper’s early, all too clever antisemitic ranting in the Pound correspondence, so malignant it made my skin crawl, might be considered as balance, contradiction, cover-up? A year after Pound’s release in 1958, in a clearly-typed copy of a letter to Kasper, he warns him that “Antisemitism is a card in the enemy program, don’t play it... They RELY on your playing it.” By 1961 he had ceased correspondence with Kasper and in 1967, five years before his death, confided to Allen Ginsberg that “the worst mistake I made was that stupid, suburban prejudice of antisemitism.” I cannot imagine the response from Frederick J. Kaspar (as he now called himself) to such a confession from his beloved “Gramp.”

In the cafe Florette says, "If I hadn't known him you wouldn't be talking to me now." This catches me off-guard, implying that we really are from different worlds, that my prying is tantamount to exploitation. "No, it's Kasper's connection to you, Florette, that makes HIM interesting to me." This seems at least partially true, yet also somewhat like a publicist's bait. Does she buy it? Or will I need to treat her like a celebrity, the star witness she seems at times to resemble. "I was always attracted to the strong man, regardless of race." OK, so Kasper played the gentleman with her. Will my meager, amateurish research sadden or madden her? Will it dredge up ancient feelings and memories long suppressed? Will she hate my naive intrusion and demand a huge fee for her private knowledge? What's it to me, or to her? She has endured and prospered through her long life. Now, why should she want to get stuck in a sordid exposé infused with archaic racial attitudes from the Eisenhower era. She wants to write her own book! And why shouldn't she be the main subject, and the Kasper narrative a subordinate tangent, a youthful folly which she triumphantly overcomes.

Florette readies herself for departure by applying multiple layers of lip gloss with a little brush while I go out into the January chill to tell the van driver to open the wheelchair-access door. As she stands grandly on the pneumatic platform holding tightly to the railing she signals with a raised thumb for the driver to beam her up, and back to Brooklyn.

George Griffin, NYC, 2007