

1977

James Mechem Wrote Me a Letter

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ore train crossing the bridge below . . . from Cripple Creek . . . for ten, fifteen, twenty minutes sometimes . . .

In the summer it was like that . . .
Smooth as silk . . .

I like to make lists of poets I like the best, and then send cards to them soliciting poems. My favorite poets at the moment, that I sent cards to just last week, are Judy Grahn, Marge Piercy, Ellen Bass, Carolyn Kizer, Erica Jong, Lucille Clifton, Diane Wakoski. If I hear from just one of them I'll feel lucky. I like to do it even when I get no response at all. That doesn't seem right. I must always get a little return or I wouldn't feel that way . . . (from a letter to the editor)

James Mechem Wrote Me a Letter / Ursule Molinaro

James Mechem wrote me a letter. On graph paper; tall, well-rounded characters fat & black on a background of tiny squares. I'm attracted to his handwriting, which indicates an outgoing, generous mind, firmly rooted in fantasy.

Yet, how can I trust him? His name reads alike backward & forward considering ch as a phonetic unity & I learned to distrust these two-faced names when a man named Laval was premier of Vichy France, during the Nazi occupation.

But then again, Mechem begins & ends with M, the most trustworthy letter in the alphabet. The first hum that broke the primordial silence: Aum
Mama Mamal Man & ME.

Numerologically, too, Mechem is reassuring. He adds up to 11, the second master number, the higher octave of 2.

M	e	ch	e	m		
13		38		13		
$\frac{4}{4}$	5	$\frac{11}{11}$	5	$\frac{4}{4}$	-	11

11 means: sensitivity toward other people's psyche an intuitive tuning in on their hidden selves a dowser sensing the seeds of situations.

It is composed of:

4 structure form logic the concept of society involvement with —&/or dread of— minutiae/routine/administration/institutions.

In the case of M, 4 is the one-digit contraction of 13, the number of outer space fallen angels ill-wishing fairies goddesses of discord karmic luggage.

5 humanity the 5 senses sex (& its extremes, from celibacy to nymphomania) the public widened horizons after emotional delusion restlessness exploration of new realms.

3 is the number of expression. Fair-haired Mercurial lightness & ease luck & wish fulfillments overdue break-ups.

8 is half matter, half mind. The top loop arches toward heaven, the bottom loop is anchored in the earth (or sinking into mud). It is manic-depressive lazy & ambitious spiritual & gross. Only when lying on its side can it relax into infinity.

But it all adds up to 11! & in the I-Ching, the Chinese Book of Changes, 11 is the hexagram T'AI / PEACE. "The small departs, the great approaches . . ."

This hexagram belongs to the Chinese first month: from mid-February to mid-March. —About the time of year when Mechem sent me the *King James Version* in which a number of his Women Without Qualities tour Southern Italy on Tiny Tits' motorcycle. & shoot *Pancho Villa on Capri*.

Tiny Tits must be the departing "small." She's probably riding back to Mankato, Kansas, this very minute, bopping across the frozen waves to speak to a writer from Wichita.

But who is the approaching "great"?

Mind Control has several methods for solving problems of this kind. I lie down on my back & fix a spot on the ceiling until my eyelids close. I breathe deeply, & count down from 3 to 1, visualizing each number three times while exhaling. After the third exhaled "1" I'm on my level. In the full-length black-framed mirror of my mind I project Tiny Tits' bopping back.

But it's my own back that comes into focus: in a backless purple bathing suit. My back is tanned. I count the prominent vertebrae on which my fellow students did their anatomy homework for the pre-med exams. I'm riding into the Lago Maggiore on a motorcycle, crouched behind a near-sighted biology student who is looking for the road out of Stresa.

I draw a large white cross over my Italian pre-med past & immediately

switch to the full-length white-framed mirror of my mind. I lie waiting for the approaching great.

The early mirror mist slowly lifts, revealing a landscape of fescue & jonquils. A golden motorcycle has risen on the horizon. Soundlessly it glides to a stop beside my outstretched shape.

Permit me to translate your name to Small-Bear Miller: the rider says to me: It facilitates the introduction.

Ossa Eats Doilies, Some Say Antimacassars: A Rondez-Voos w James / Kent H. Dixon

To: Kent H. Dixon
1011 N. Summit St.
Iowa City, Iowa

1 February 1970

London, England

Dear Kent . . .

Thanks for staying in there with the little book project. I would say the enclosed four, plus the Borges piece, Merwin's DWELLING, Chambers's CAKE, and your MARY, MARY were all in. How many more can Kim print? Right now we could add four or five, something by Persinger (if you insist), Kelly's OPERA, Vogelsang's A FILM OF OUR . . . BUT FIRST, and then as you say, there's Aukema, Kosinski, Hawkes, Barth, Gass, et al. I'll write Barthelme c/o NEW YORKER.

As for your writer's cramp, yes, writing *is* full of suffering and exhilaration, but you have to do it to do it, Kent. To fail to choose to write is not the same as to choose not to write. There's a depressing obverse to this, but it's not your problem (talent and commitment can yield nothing, go undiscovered even by other writers; think of the close calls—Dickinson, Kafka, West; think of the ones that got away; things could be very different).

Sorry to hear how hard it is for you and Errin to make a steady go of things. Iowa City is not known for its stable relationships. If you're not presently enrolled, why not settle someplace else for a time. It's taken an ocean and fifty miles of country roads, but it's reduced our visitors to only the most