

Bait and Switch

Two important but discredited American writers from the twentieth and nineteenth centuries are Jack Kerouac (1922-1969) and Nathaniel Coburn Carter (1840-1904) the two men came from New England both born in damp and cold Lowell Massachusetts and neither remained there for long Jack Kerouac literally went on the road to write up and create his own generation the beat generation and Nathaniel Coburn Carter was exiled from Lowell by his tuberculosis so spent the first half of his life maybe living on the road in the Jack Kerouac manner an invalid struggling back and forth across the continent not trying to create a generation but find a cure and Nathaniel Coburn Carter wrongly imagined that he found the cure out in the south of California in the San Gabriel Valley with its unsettling blue summer skies violent temperature shifts and seasonal biblical punishments of wind fire and flood and here Carter founded Sierra Madre.

Jack Kerouac was as exacting about who was welcome to join his generation as Nathaniel Coburn Carter was about who could live in Sierra Madre to become a beatnik Jack Kerouac expected you to be as mad as he was The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow Roman candles, exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue center light pop and everybody goes Awwwww! and that is well put but to be part of Nathaniel Coburn Carter's Sierra Madre it helped to have tuberculosis.

Jack Kerouac was a prolific writer Nathaniel Coburn Carter less so. Advancing the cause of the beat generation Jack

Kerouac during the 1950s and 1960s speed-wrote books action tomes including *On the Road* the following passage has for components a narrow bridge congested with sluggish cars a giant truck-trailer looming from the other direction and the careening Cadillac limousine of Kerouac's avatar Dean Moriarty Dean came down on this at 110 mph and never hesitated. He passed the slow cars, swerved, and almost hit the left rail of the bridge, went head-on in the shadow of the unslowing truck, cut right sharply, just missed the truck's left front wheel, almost hit the first slow cars, pulled out to pass, and then had to cut back in line when another car came out from behind the truck to look, all in a matter of two seconds, flashing by and leaving nothing more than a cloud of dust instead of a horrible five-way crash with cars lurching in every direction and the great truck humping its back in the fatal red afternoon... and this passage is I think great wfo writing but Nathaniel Coburn Carter's literary output consists of the promotional pamphlets and posters that he the New England expatriate composed in the 1870s and 1880s for distribution among the New England wretched who were in the same respiratory distress as Nathaniel Coburn Carter himself Health wealth and happiness in Sierra Madre Village of eternal sunshine Carter wrote and that was a fantastic lie and Nathaniel Coburn Carter should have been honest and said Sierra Madre was the Village of the white plague.

Jack Kerouac's books seemed new and breathtaking prose which was spontaneous and Jack Kerouac claimed his books were unedited and Nathaniel Coburn Carter's was a fresh kind of writing too and not until the birth of the automobile and its cottage industry of flamboyant used-car dealers with coded vocabularies was a term coined for it and it was bait and switch.

Nathaniel Coburn Carter was a strapping man but by the time he got out in California his weight had fallen to 147 pounds and he was desperate and may have considered going to live under the ground in the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky with one hundred other lungers the cavern air was considered salubrious but it wasn't salubrious and the one hundred lungers died in a year and then came the Mexican-American War and whatever the real reasons the United States had for starting the burlesque to allow more slave states into the union to keep more slave states out or to rook Mexicans out of property whatever the true issues were the hostilities ended in two years 1846-1848 and afterward California entered statehood and then on cue predatory plunderers tricky speculators wheeler-dealer buccaneers land-rapists and other early capitalists of the criminal persuasion moved into the state's south to grab what was left of the old Spanish land grants and pocket obscene profits pedaling the real estate for ten times what they paid for it and they included the octopus Southern Pacific railroad whose tentacles were wrapped around almost everything and Elias Jackson Baldwin who seemed to own whatever SP didn't and a husband and wife named Richardson who were among the earliest and fiercest homesteaders in the San Gabriel Valley living like hermits among the rattlesnakes and coyotes in the desolate foothills of no-man's land and Nathaniel Coburn Carter's decision to make himself one of the earth pirates seemed a dubious career move he was not a natural salesman in failed prior attempts he hadn't been able to move groceries sewing machines or even American Flags and to purchase the three square miles of no man's land which became Sierra Madre Carter had to go to SP Baldwin and the Richardson couple and all three richly fucked him especially the two Richardson couple they were canny and

Carter apparently had to foreclose on the Richardson couple to take possession of real estate he paid for. Carter's bait and switch literature subsequently got distributed throughout New England and was well received among the infirm of cities like Concord Middleboro Bridgeport and especially Lowell where Carter had gullible family members and friends and soon those New Englanders dumb enough to fall for bait and switch and purchase property maybe sight unseen from Nathaniel Coburn were being shipped across America to Sierra Madre the Village of the white plague and it was a peregrination of almost 2,500 miles aboard slow-moving Carter Tour trains.

Our trip took nine days...we were held in Benson, Arizona, in the middle of the night, waiting for another train from California. The train crew locked up our sleepers and went up to town to get something to eat when a lot of cowboys, not being able to get in the doors, built a fire of railroad ties under our car to drive us out but we were saved by the crew returning in time to drive them away.

We had been ignorant of the foothill wind that blew seasonally from the interior...it made sleep impossible, it blasted the nerves, it could ruin the roof. It had its own rhythmic weather. Toward evening the air would become clear and glassy and a paw of wind would reach into the garden and shake the trees and scuffle with any loose foliage on the ground. Then silence. Silence almost as menacing as the sound of the wind itself. When night fell it settled down to its real performance – hours or possibly days of buffeting, thrashing and banging...we learned every sigh and roar, every whack of its repertoire and especially the long frightening slide and spring of power as it came down the mountains and landed on us with a

vibrating hoot into the chimney...the sides of the church gave way and the building collapsed...

Sunday morning we saw a small fire up in the mouth of the Canyon. That night the wind blew furiously from the north and east which spread the fire rapidly. In a short time it looked very frightful and dangerous. The men wanted to do something about it but we were afraid to be left alone. Mr. Holser hitched up the horses and took us to Mrs. Pierce's house. She lived where Mr. Felgate now does. Mrs. Cook and her baby, Gertrude, slept with Mrs. Pierce and her baby, Vora. I slept on the couch. Mr. Holser and Mr. Cook came back and loaded their furniture onto the farm wagon in readiness to drive it away to a safe place if the fire came too near. They put ours out on the plowed land for safety...Mr. Holser came up and got us the next morning and brought us home. The house was filled with dust and dirt. He asked if I didn't wish I was in the east again. I replied.

The floods of 1883-1884 were followed by the floods of 1889-1890...horses fell in the mud and children lost their rubbers walking...the wash was about fifty feet wide and quite deep and the horses would not attempt to cross it...torrential rain had caused a deep rut across Central avenue at about where Hermosa avenue is now. It was so wide that I had to throw Frank, then four years old, across the wash into the arms of Mr. Cook, and later, as storm waters had been diverted through Mrs. Jones's place directly across the street of our house, my father and I fought the water practically all night and managed to keep it out of the front room. The next day the devastation of Mrs. Jones place was sad to look at. The men of Sierra Madre offered to help restore it, but she was too proud to accept the service.

In July of 1950 Sierra Madre was celebrating what was called Pioneer Days and the chamber of commerce like every chamber of commerce was doing its best to bury the scandal of th SierraMadre having been the Village of the white plague as if anyone still remember there was an incident when Charles Worthington Jones first mayor of Sierra Madre he was elected in 1907 and afterward forced to serve seven grueling terms because nobody else would take the job was moved to make his own candid comments about the Sierra Madre past and without once mentioning his name Mayor Jones lambasted Nathaniel Coburn Carter and what his baiting and switching had wrought.

Mayor Jones was well past the age of senility he wasn't going to mince words including terms once considered unmentionable including tuberculosis so Mayor Jones complained that carries of tuberculosis swarmed to Sierra Madre and it was an unhealthy and dangerous condition so for those who were really ill sanitariums were constructed. Sierra Madre was as broke in Mayor Jones's time as it is today and Sierra Madreans were just as averse to paying new taxes as we are today and maybe Sierra Madre didn't build sanitariums at all but perhaps shipped all its pathetic lungers down to Baldwin's empty Santa Anita horse race track to fend for themselves in the squalor of the dilapidated stables the same dirty trick that Sierra Madre and Franklin Roosevelt paid on our village's hapless Nisei population at the time of Pear Harbor prior to their forced evacuation to the gulag of Manzanar or maybe that other death camp that was in Arizona.

I do not mean to be hard on Nathaniel Coburn Carter we are relatives although extremely remote relatives and Nathaniel Coburn Carter founded Sierra Madre the only

place I want to live and where I was born and have lived almost all my life and Carter's photograph hangs in city hall or did the last time I looked and his expression is trancelike he looks confused even sad although Carter must have done well here he surely made a lot of money from all the lots he sold he built and owned the first hotel, school, cemetery, half the water supply and has two streets named after him. Sierra Madre surely disappointed him by failing to be a panacea for t.b. the terrible disease continues to run wild in parts of the world and there's no cure-all vaccine so his Village of eternal sunshine did not prolong his life after all right up to his premature death in 1904 aged only 64

Carter was too weak to work it says in Anals of Sierra Madre but the same book says on occasion he set out from his big ugly mansion on the heights of north Baldwin avenue where he looked down on the rest of the village, to make the long ride over to Los Angeles and back on a horse called Belle and judging from the lyrics of the song song Carter is quoted as singing throughout his trips Sierra Madre was again in flood:

One wide river to cross, one wide river to cross
Gid up along there, old Belle. One wide river to cross,
one wide river to cross, gid up along there old Belle.

Carter's styling of writing got discredited because of lawyers baiting and switching today will get you sued if not hammered with a savage class-action suit yet between the achievements of Nathaniel Coburn Carter and Jack Kerouac Carter's is the greater because Jack's beat generation burned out in one generation while Sierra Madre is entered its ninth or tenth I forget which.

Jack Kerouac lost stature with me when I learned that On the Road was edited Malcolm Crowley edited it but Jack in his travels did reach the frontier of Sierra

Madre he and a gorgeous chicana companion called Terry were hitch-hiking along Huntington the drive named after the nephew of the railroad tyrant who was possibly the worst son of a bitch ever born no that was Elias Jackson Baldwin and this was in Arcadia the sham Grecian slum constructed by Baldwin for the purpose of isolating and even destroying Sierra Madre and while Jack and Terry were hitch-hiking along Huntington and no Arcadians would stop to give Jack and Terry a lift and hooligans in automobiles even yelled and while Jack was in the process of berating them in return he happened to gaze northward and see snow-capped mountains it's in On The Road and they were the San Gabriels once known as the Sierra Madreans and the year must have been 1947 when Sierra Madre for once wasn't being mauled by wind fire and flood but we were having what was perhaps our first snowstorm and I well remember that seeing all of Kersting Court dusted white was a wonder.