

Friend to Gnawledge—Fiction by Julian Mithra

We are the Lord's
handiwork, sanctified in
Christ to do good
works, for which the
Lord has prepared us.
Ephesians 2:10

*Being an Authoritative
Grammary of Lenni
Lenape the language
spoken by the people of the
Delaware together with
four myths of spiritual
belief*

*How to Collect
Mushrooms in the
Cumberland lowlands and
receipts for their
preparation including ten
original illustrations from
life*

*Materia medica for lice and
house infestations of vermin
with a guarantor of
absolute elimination and
restoration of domestic
peace*

“Ho, fellers,” a man fanning pamphlets hailed Polly-cum-Paulie. We slonkers hovered near Linder and Fourth, a hive of mills spewing smoke. He looked the picture of an eccentric I-talia, an admixture of slept-in-a-stage and erudition, ink-splotched, high-foreheaded.

“Yer pamphlets? We read ’em,” Paulie fawned.

The pamphleteer looked across our naked faces as though he had cast his net upon the sea and brought up shimmering marlins and no weed. “Rafinesque, delighted to be sure,” his accent thick as hollandaise. The over-tall man enjoyed the privilege of a name which flounced adjectival. Rafinesque doffed his cap to us like a rogue. It raised our hackles. Which it ought, for he had been picking at citadels of vice for new taxonomies. He would begin with an aks, straight out, for our given names and birthrights. When we denied any, he persisted with our epithets, scribbling them in his book.

Regan scattered a few pamphlets and jeered at anyone crackbrained enough to taste the man's drizzle of omniscience, its palaver of honey, as it overlaid a fine-hatched map of our transverse traversals across The City Of. When directly interviewed by Rafinesque, Regan had declined to elucidate our methods for selecting inclusion in the brotherhoods. For Regan counted hymself among the original settlers of these green valleys

[cf. muddy plots]

Dear Friend to
Gnawledge,

Herein lies a feast for
the intellect. I have
endeavored to
differentiate the
peculiar abundance of
bands of youth, unique
in their dress, mood,
and custom, with an
aim to aid those in
need of brotherhood.

This cyclopaedic
account is exhaustive
and true according to
the band's leaders and
participants.

pumpkin seed hulls
four-toed claw

of noble Germantown who battled for independence more fiercely than the late-coming English, Dutch, and Swedes, believing in a man's place to choose his governance, which victory had earned him the right to keep his gnawledge to himself.

Others, whether by greed of attention or loss of the right to refusal, had volunteered elaborate narratives. Gregorson fed on Rafinesque's concern; Landry hoped to banish the ghost of detainment in the Catcher's prison. We never read suspenseful tales of vice and redemption. Perhaps Rafinesque conjectured that his audience, eager for frontier edification, would not brook such outlandish portraits.

Having before been stymied in his pincering of our apparati and magnifying-glass of our scars, Rafinesque hesitated. Paulie strutted forward, a ham-fisted hack at the arrangement of letters, those backward blocks a'skittering through es fingers, finding the gaps. Apprenticing had almost been ridiculed to disappearance, so many 'apprenices' sacrificed to beatings n worse sex matters.

Paulie took the stack of pamphlets without paying. "I've a taste to gnawledge, sir. An appetite for it, y'see. They didn't take me at Taylor & Moore on account of my—"—e gestured to es personage—"—nor at Lember & Lemberly."

"Ah, the printers, gussied and greased. For my intellectual success, I've no shop for an apprentice to apprence!"

worn flint
 spurdle
 cracked crock
 empty Torvey's
 Liniment
 busted spindle
 a quilted glove
 five toothpicks
 (two w/
 flourishes)
 comb tine

syn.:
 fauney-dropper
 theater-goer
 bench-splitter
 ring-polisher
 nose-dauber
 lantern-lighter
 copper-clanger
 chicken-strangler

Rafinesque, Eustace.
 Ph.D. Appointment,
 Lecturer, Natural
 History, Jefferson
 College, Kentucky
 (1824-28); Head
 Collector, American
 Museum (1820-22);
 Publisher, Editor, and
 Distributor of tracts;
 Botanist, Philologist,

Undaunted, Paulie Adam-ed off findings from beneath Callowhill Bride where e late hung a fishing net for the purpose of accumulation of detritus townies found irredeemable before it flowed through the Water Works. These e taxonomied into the realms of the body to which they facilitated: sight, sound, smell, digestibles, skin, and soul. Rafinesque mayn't have recognized Paulie, but certainly recognized es factlorn hunger and could not turn from its maw.

A shout alerted us tarriers to none but Rowland the liberty-meddler rolling down the block. Before we could scatter, he caught hold of a few necks.

Rafinesque swooped to our defense with an overarching arabesque. "Good sir, I beg you, that is my apprentice!"

Reaching for his Notice Book, Rowland guffawed. "An who is You to be a master, eh? None too masterful by the looks of it," no doubt referring to the nankeen trousers or hat tied down with what appeared to be a plaid table covering.

"Ah, Eustace Rafinesque, Esquire. Charmed," and his hand a semblance of a woman's to be kissed.

Rowland recoiled. "Hmrrrgh. Oi know a *languisher* when Oi see one... *sur*," he added sarcastically. And no amount of bargaining nor number of gimcrack pamphlets would persuade otherwise. In a fit of pique, Rowland issued a nonbinding notice to Rafinesque, and read it aloud in an attempt to draw a crowd.

Pulmist, Pharmacist,
Conchologist

Field Instruments

caliper
sieve
eye-glass
folding ruler
gouache
blotting paper
oil pencil
razor & hone

Ohio Tributaries

Allegheny, Kanawha,
Guyandotte, Sandy,
Licking, Kentucky,
Salt, Green,
Cumberland,
Tennessee,
Beaver, Muskingum,
Little, Shade, Scioto,
Wabash

bone
deerskin
china
mica
tannin
marble
nacre
coral
hayseed

Regan gestured to flee. Paulie slid es arm into Rafinesque's crook and led him like a thunder-struck ewe away from the blighter. He had to pledge his word *not to palaver nor take down their speech nor distribute incendiary materials nor advantage them in any way, so help him with the Devil's fork*. So it was accomplished that our interlocutor became an elder at Holme House, anointed by castigation, and our pretty Paulie usurped Regan as the herald-hollerer. Regan pushed us to nickname the man Blackbeard or such, but it didn't stick. He had too much of the custom's house about him.

Paulie was satisfied that a near-mother on a farm could be replaced by a near-father on an inkblock, and this one equipped neither with willow withy nor Bible. Between edits, Paulie found the stay-put stood at a window, eyes on the fourth ferry inlet where a cluster of men with buckets, to unknown end, scooped mud. Rafinesque missed his bucket and trowel, held-up boots, his sieves and frames bound with varying gradations of grates, three-leg stool, his rakes and irons and pincers and tongs. Fettered by implements of gnawledge, how long he could stoop at a frame set on a bin, pouring over sediment like Faust at tomes, plucking a chipped shell or snapped tibia. In-of-doors later in the evening, he missed sorting hue. How could underwater whites be bleached so distant from sunlight? Were lanterns unshuttered in the deep, eroding color with their drenching rays? Or did their color drain like effluvium?

Then, like a secondary God, he would illustrate their jagged edges and versos, casting chaff from wheat.

goat's cream
linen
parchment
rennet
ale

A discerning, bespectacled God, ink-fingered, plucking evidence of occupation of the valley from an errant mudslide and accidental flood. The arbiter of toponymy, afloat on currents of Latin, spume-flecked, declensioned. Alas, such holiness escaped him here.

Freshwater shells of the Alleghenie
lamp mussel
eltoe
club shell
brook floater
riffle shell
mucket
pocketbook

A changeling twice-over, Paulie clung to the patriarch, sure that e had flicked es lonelinesses off the Seventh Street bridge and would meet them no longer. For it was a new frontier of loneliness that would accost the clatter of constant, the hum of humdrum. Human company, it was clear to Paulie, did not compare to the company of fishes and mollusks and thallophytes with their mute fellowship along the Alleghenie. How would e reach sessile Rafinesque, glued to this patch, or soothe his wanderer's jaw itching with unspoken nomenclature?

Species of Bivalve *Potamilus*

1. Shell transverse, thick, without knobs
 - a. *P. tatissimus*
 - b. *P. violacinus*
 - c. *P. fasciolaris*
 - d. *P. faeidrus*
 - e. *P. ellipticus*
 - f. *P. zonalis*
 - g. *P. obliquatis*
1. Shell transverse, truncated posteriorly, thick
 - a. *P. retusus*
 - b. *P. truncatus*
 - c. *P. triqueter*
1. Shell transverse, thin, not truncated.
 - a. *P. elatus*

After dinner, Paulie wiped our mouths and rounded us at Rafinesque's feet. By firelight at a squint, he recited hand-lettered field notes, as though we would absorb from their Latinate syllabification orbs of lavender, whorls counterclockwise, or lobed spathe, or gray collars, or anything in motion and signaling life. Each with a stub of coal, we were dulled by their march of distinguishment. The representations of species lapped at our toes. The more daring cavorted up to our braces, but only Paulie would hold es nose and dunk under.

Forced to confront a problem of order, Regan still argued for mishmash and addleplate: a thing

- b. *P. fragilis*
- c. *P. nervosus*
- d. *P. auretus*

The tenth annual report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States

An inaugural address, delivered in the city of Washington.

Directions how to stock and use Gideon Davis's improved barsbare or fallow plough.

A brief account of the awakening and conversion of David Smith, preacher of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Catalogue of kitchen-garden, field and flower seeds, bulbous roots, &c. sold by G. Thorburn and Son.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Genesis 1:1-3

and its word headlong over waterfalls and jumbling, such that Regan had been lately Regina and a hound a wolf + centuries of tossed trenchers. Ever the contrarian, and stuck on Rafy, Paul defended order. “It is the wolf that calls for w-u-l-f, his wolfy ways so divergent from the stag or gull.”

To fuel glossalia, we netted the pipes at the roof to arrest stray pamphlets and epistles and bulletins as they skittered through the wind. Unschooled, the chimbley-catchment could not be entrusted to just anyone. We escorted em to the oddment hall, and watched enrapt as Paulie lowered the chest that held a month of text down the flue.

The meekest of us did not argue his monomania; we had inherited diffidence for quills. The boldest were further emboldened, only latently appreciating how our trans-formative dispositions might have primed us for such acts of artifice, as we too had chimæraed ourselves to The City Of Abiding Love Between Brothers, exchanged lashes for spittal, bonnets for thumbs, pleasesirs for underbites, and arrived at a masculine species who thrived on pseudonym.

Rafinesque parted with them both. “In the beginning was not the word, but the void into which the unnamed object would be placed. In the beginning, there existed the drawer. In the beginning, there existed the envelope.

Lutecens abruptus (Arthropoda)

Habitat: within glaciers. Mien: eye-tentacles sting at the slightest provocation. Diet: frozen minerals. Known predators: warmth. Useful extractives: orange dye.

Obliquaria revulbus (Insecta)

Habitat: Appalachian caves. Mien: solitary and withdrawn. Diet: guano. Known predators: badger. Useful extractives: potent musk.

Canopus punctatus (Vegetal)

Habitat: marshland. Mien: difficult navigation. Corpus: Spines withdraw when wet. Eaten by: Deer browse. Useful extractives: salt-like spice.

Klinopi obsucrantus (Lichen)

Habitat: granite escarpment. Mien: subdued. Corpus: frilly skirts. Diet: mist. Eaten by: drought. Useful extractives: ballet choreography.

Proposed Lectures: Mechanics Library

Types of Lightning

- A. root lightning
- B. branched

Paulie gathered our chalked imaginaries. Our Grotesques. The illustrations were elaborate such that even Audubon would have gutted and stuffed us all for one four-color plate. “Why,” Paulie exclaimed one sabbath, as we whittled away at limb and jaw, “if great minds should doubt the rhinoceros of the savanna and the duck-mole of New South Wales, if they should ink the delicate wings of butterflies and seam the ears of reptiles, should they not lap up these *Species ficticius* like dogs returning to vomit?”

We were the denizens of an institute yet to be substantiated by a carved edifice. On Fourth Street, benevolence took the form of a cornucopia spilling its gnawledge, overflowing with libraries, catalogs, lectures, cyclopedias, and monographs. It housed an assembly to rival Alexandria and the monasteries burned by Vikings and Mayan scrolls and pagan heresy lost to fire in the library of Antioch. How odd that, like church, young men now flocked to Halls of Truth to worship professors whose names had acquired a tail of letters.

Driven by envy, Rafinesque desired to conscript our publications into the libraries of institutions that had lately despoiled his reputation. Bereft of

- 1. forked
- 2. angel (topped with haloes)
- C. false lightning
 - 1. meteor
 - 2. unknown
- D. mute (unaccompanied by thunder)
- E. herd
 - 1. grazing
 - 2. stampede
 - 3. triumphal

What Constitutes A Genus? Corrective Boundaries in a Burgeoning Field, with local examples from baywaters florula, and a defense of trinomials.

Continual Production, on the emergence of new species from those old and obsolete, by process of gradual deviations of shapes, forms and organs.

Establishment of a Public Botanical Agricultural and Medical Garden in Kentucky at Transylvania University

Amenities of Nature. Extracting balm, glue, foodstuff, spice, and building materials from common plants.

In anticipation of military and political imperialism,

Patriarch of Enlightenment taxonomy, Carl Linnaeus devoted himself to constructing an all-encompassing system of classification of every last living thing

means to enter these hallowed grounds, we persuaded him to approach the democratic Mechanics Library, est. 1820, to gain membership for himself as a lecturer and us as collectors and preservers. Paulie tagged along while Rafinesque presented false letters of reference from deceased experts to officials who relied upon this sort of introduction. A prefect welcomed him to the hall.

“Rafinesque, Esquire.”

“Ah, Ra-fin-es-quire,” someone quipped.

“And Paul Stoepker,” Paulie invented, pronouncing Paul pah-OOL like the Dutch. E bowed as if before a magistrate or duke.

A chorus of ahs and hmms.

“We have read, with interest, your errant pamphlets on unusual specimens of the Ohio River Valley,” one gentleman began. “Though not without dissention!”

It emerged that one camp, supportive and gracious, were kindled by Rafinesque’s alchemy of classification, as each specimen was both

European scientists used nomenclature and collecting practices to colonize domains of knowledge.

Classificatory schema for plants instantiated heteronormative assumptions about sexual reproduction.

Pseudoscientists from 19th century (defenders of slavery and Manifest Destiny) to 20th century eugenicists, fascists, and white terrorists trace their authority on racial hierarchies to Linnaeus.

By naturalizing an object of study, a discipline invents the object as if a *posteriori*.

in the 18th century. Fueling his *Systema Naturae* with species from all climates and continents required collecting specimens alongside “explorers” sent to conquer and establish colonies in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and North and South America.

Trained in botany, Linnaeus spent many a pleasant afternoon gardening. Each plant found its place in the totalizing map of God’s creation through the presence of its “male” and “female” organ. Hence, he grouped anomalous and disturbing vegetation with no clear sexual dimorphism, such as algae, lichen, fungi, moss, ferns, horsetails, etc., as Cryptogamia, or those whose methods of growth remained mysterious and secretive.

His efforts at omniscience also laid bare his enculturation when it came to humans, proposing distinct “types” of *Homo sapien* not only based on skin color and height, but linked to behavior and personality.

plastered to its common brethren and differentiated by particularity.

Another camp, allegiant to an immutable order, took offense at deviation, a theater of forms whelming the stage and speaking through ventriloquy.

Within es soul, Paul tossed specimens to a pit in search of its bottom.

The supportive camp prevailed so the library solicited pamphlets and lectures. Our efforts at filching potato eyes were soon replaced by setting-up, type-checking, scrounging paper and staples, poking with awls and threading with hemp. Of an afternoon, we mongers resembled one of our phantasmagoric creatures: white leaves fluttering, talons piercing, feathers fluttering, arms rotating, an orifice issuing issues. And who but Paul with es ruler at the foot of the stairs conducting the symphony of presses, whirr and resonant.

Rafinesque delivered lantern lectures that edified and ascended and enlightened and enriched those who could be stolen from vice and ushered into the hush of academic authority. Our deception remained unnoticed for few three months.

Zeus, vengeful at being tricked out of delicious ox sacrifice, forbids mortals from using fire. Prometheus cannily steals fire from Mount Olympus, sympathizing with weak mortals. The spark smolders safely within a stalk of fennel and promises warmth.

Infuriated, Zeus banishes Prometheus to a penal landscape, reinforcing hierarchy as the proper order of democracy threatened by emotion. Here, the liver is the seat of anger.

Utopianists in the early 19th century praised the ancient myth as a progressive allegory. Technological advancement ensured that man would dominate over nature.

Percy unbound Prometheus, “Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain” while “Heaven's winged hound, polluting from thy lips/ His beak in poison not his own, tears up [his] heart.” Rebellious, the romantic hero overthrows the corrupt and cruel god, so that free will and humanism can flourish. (Shelley, 1820)

Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson;

In the scramble to populate our pamphlets, Paulie the polliwog squirmed with unsurity while Paul the expert preened and chortled. True, es voice swelled under Rafinesque’s score. Yet, late, when the pages had roosted in the rafters, Paulie quelled the silence. If e didn’t quell it, it would rise out of the lake sleek as a loon. It would puddle on es stoop. It would sink, inveigle, pluck at es slubs. E’d be caught with one oar spinning round and round.

Silence guarded the membrane between inner and outer. How brazenly e had fled church, its bottomless well, its soul-gaze, its depthfulness, its heartbeat when it seemed as though the Lord had abandoned this mortal plain and absconded with the primacy of body. And now e scrimmaged relentlessly with the visible world, romanced by Rafinesque’s faith in fact. E climbed an ever-mounting hill and gazed an ever-rising zenith which settled es senses, those organs properly equipped to gnostic gathering.

If e, on occasion, lamented of this amassment, it was made worse by hypocrisy.

Paulie childed after the near-father. Never had e felt loved before Rafinesque; never had e dreaded its retraction. Most days, conditional love was worth devotion. E approached

and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth;

Matthew 1:2-5

Inspired by Mechanics Institutes in Ireland, which taught working classes about science and technology, Franklin founded The Library Company In Philadelphia in 1731. By subscription, one could borrow books and engage in public debate.

and distanced, believing that e would be transformed into a Rafinesque through proximity. A man? An authority? A cornucopia? E chased that stick along the riverbank until it gamboled to the delta and was swept by forces stronger than desire alone.

We conjectured that it was Gray or Nuttall or Franklin's second cousins who took up arms against us in the cavalry of hierarchy, as they enjoyed the privilege of brick and gas lamps. At the Sap Moon as the maples weeped, we were banished from the Mechanics Library with beseechments to leave the gnawledging to those with sharper canines. We licked our wounds and hoarded our coins. Most returned to Regan's fold, unresentfully.

If anything, Paulie missed es name in print, though it resembled him not. Rafinesque disappeared from our garret, no doubt redonning his nankeen and leather to return to Appalachia. Paulie labored for two days digging a pit and lining it with stone. On the morning of the third day, e hauled packets of pamphlets, sheafs of charcoals, scraps, samples, newsprint, trimmings, and every flammable piece of detritus to its hearth.

Alone, e struck the starter and brought fire from its hiding place in flint to the material realm of eye and skin. The flare, coddled by catkin, hungered for fuel.

E finally felt the loss inferred by specie-mongery, as though an insufficient number of eagles and rats and scarabs must be supplemented by linguistic endeavor. The holes in God's dome. Lacuna in prayer. Crevasses gaping.

Matching the fire's appetite, sheet by sheet, booklet by booklet, Pall opened a chasm in es middle and looked inward, perhaps all the way into its glacier. That frozen stasis; that crystalline lattice. That hold-still. A grasp that yoked em to a gnawing fervor. And whose fervor, then, had numbed es hunger. Whose hunger? Is.

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