DAVID D. BUTLER

Francisco Zurbaran, *Lamb of God*

1. San Francisco, California, 1967

In the late 1960's, I lived in San Francisco but dated a woman who lived in Berkeley. Often, I'd catch the Friday evening Alameda-Contra Costa [AC] bus from the terminal at the western foot of the Bay Bridge. I'd get off in the woman's neighborhood, walk to her house, and we'd spend the weekend together.

The woman had classes Monday morning at Mills College. I worked loading ships Monday to Friday mornings on the San Francisco Waterfront. The Viet-Nam war sent millions of tons of cargo to Asia from the Port of San Francisco before Richard Nixon finally declared victory and used helicopters to evacuate our embassy.

Thus, late afternoon on Sundays, I'd take AC home to San Francisco. At the AC terminal on the San Francisco side, I'd transfer to a Mission Street San Francisco Municipal Railway gas bus or electric curb liner and let it take me two blocks from my home on Dolores Street at Liberty.

This was before 1969 and the enactment of the initial version of the American Environmental Protection Act. Often the smog would lay so thick on the Bay that you couldn't see the San Francisco side from Berkeley. From San Francisco, you couldn't even see the tallest Building on the Berkeley campus, an edifice every Bay Area undergraduate (a flock of original minds) cleverly termed Sather's Last Erection.

One Sunday evening coming back from Berkeley, I saw a large flock of Western Sandpipers feeding in the mud at the eastern end of the Bay Bridge. Poisoned by

D.D.T. and airplane, motor vessel, truck, bus, and car exhaust, the Bald Eagle, the Cormorant, and the Brown Pelican were quickly going extinct.

But the Western Sandpiper, like the Brown rat, and the urban pigeon, throve in the polluted mud of the salt flats. Presumably they ate the mollusks which would have fed young Eagles, Cormorants, and Brown Pelicans. I remember thinking that the Sandpipers' lives were the deaths of the mollusks they ate. I remember thinking that Sandpipers have a group mind, like undergraduates, moving the flock in one direction or another as a single organism.

Just west of the tunnel through the hill of Yerba Buena, the AC bus passed an open truck loaded with white sheepskins. The blood on the fleeces was still red. I remember thinking the sheep had been alive hours earlier in some Valley town, Manteca (lard), Fresno (ash-tree, ash-wood), maybe even Modesto (Our Lady of Modesty). I remember also thinking that the sheep's fleeces were now on the way to make coats for the sort of people who liked to go to and liked to talk about Robert Redford movies.

Often I'd be one of five or six people on the Sunday evening buses. Usually, there was no traffic Sunday from Berkeley to San Francisco. My few fellow passengers spoke only Cantonese or Spanish, often Tagalong, so I'd get lost in a book.

This Sunday, however, there were two elderly (as old as I am now) English-speaking winos on the San Francisco Mission Street bus. As we passed the then new garage at 5th and Mission going west, one of the winos pointed at the new garage and said, "I used to sell my blood at the old blood bank over there and drink it up" – here he pointed at a saloon on the north side of Mission "there" – I think the site of one of the numerous Harrington bars.

2. Madrid, the Prado, 2004

Years later in the Prado I saw Francisco de Zurbaran's 1635 - 1640 painting, *Agnus Dei,* or Lamb of God. It's a simple painting of a young white horned ram, his four legs tied together, lying on a brown wood slab. The ram's eyes are slightly open. They see acceptance. They see terror. They see both, simultaneously. Even four hundred years later, Francisco Zurbaran is a very great painter.

I've forgotten whether the San Francisco Bay was obscured by smog that Sunday evening. I've forgotten the book I'd gotten lost in. For some years, I forgot the name of the young woman who lived in Berkeley.

But I've never forgotten the Sandpipers feeding on the mollusks, the sight of the bloody sheepskins, the remark of the wino about selling his blood and then crossing Mission Street to drink up the blood money. Whenever I go to the Prado,

I look at the Goyas, the Velasquezs, even the Hieronymus Bosch paintings, but I always spend most of my time in front of Zurbaran's *Agnus Dei*. At sixty, one never knows, which is being interpreted in genteel American English for at sixty, one always knows.

Sundays morning I am almost always alone in the Prado though it is the one admission free day. One Sunday, however, there was a small group of church-going Mid West Americans getting the word on Lamb of God from their priest/tour guide. From their whispered flat accents, I think they and their priest/guide were from Ohio, perhaps Cleveland or, best, Toledo. I waited until they left, then sat for an hour alone in front of the painting. I was then fifty-eight years' old.

Three days before general elections and ten days before we'd flown to Madrid in March, 2004, bombs had killed 191 people at Atocha train station. The Atocha station is kitty-corner across from the Prado and the Royal Botanical Garden. Aznar, the then Conservative Prime Minister, immediately opined that the bomb was the work of Basque separatists. The Basque Separatists have their flaws. They do not, however, intentionally do collateral damage, killing hundreds of civilians. They promptly apologize for what collateral damage they do.

The first day after the train bombing, Spain's trains, packed with passengers for work in the capital of Madrid, arrived on schedule at the Atocha station.[1] Four days later, Aznar was driven from office bent double beneath the lash of an enraged electorate.

In 1973, Basque separatists blew up the car in which the new Spanish President, Admiral Luis Blanco, Francisco Franco's right hand man, was just leaving daily mass. The explosion sent the driver, a bodyguard, the Spanish President, and the car itself, to land on the second floor of San Francisco de Borga Church. The three men died on impact, possibly before. Spain keeps everything. The polished plate armor of the dog of Emperador Carlos I de Espana y V de Alemania is displayed at the carriage museum opposite the Royal Palace. The car in which Admiral Blanco ascended into death is still lovingly preserved in the Spanish Army Museum in Madrid.

Luis Jeronimo de Cabrera, the Fourth Count of Chinchon, served as Viceroy of Peru from 1629 to 1639. There, he listened to an Inca surgeon who told him of Quinine bark, some of which was used to cure Cabrera's Vicereine of malaria. The Viceroy brought back to Spain the Quinine tree which was the foundation for the Royal Botanic Garden, just east of the Prado. Maize and tomatoes, now long time partners in the dance of the Mediterranean table, came soon after.

The Ohioans gone, I stood up and then walked up to the painting to take one final look. Then I walked out to sit among the pools of the Royal Botanical Garden. I reflected on what I had just seen.

The Aztecs in their time were slave owners, warriors, and terrorists. The Incas built their roads on the backs of slaves. Hernan Cortez was in his time a slave owner, a warrior, and a terrorist. The Arabs still buy and sell slaves: They still practice mass terror.

Think, for a moment, only of Southern Somalia. God or Darwin alone knows who will be a slave trader, who a slave master, and who a slave when the oil runs out and three billion or more hungry people come to the table of this Earth.

There is an Angel d'or minted by Philip of France in 1311, well before the Discovery of the New World. This Lamb, unlike Zurbaran's Lamb of God, is hopeful, even triumphant. This Lamb is striding, proudly, carrying Christ's banner. But in 1311, trade and her handmaiden, good wages, were dancing a macabre minuet in the aftermath of the Dark Ages and the onset of the labor shortage caused by the Black Death.

3. Conclusion, the United States of America, 2012

Like all educated Spaniards, Zurbaran knew that inbreeding, syphilis, and lead-lined pipes were putting paid to the Spanish Habsburg's feeble attempt to engender a potent, even a normal crown prince. These attempts ended risibly and sadly in Carlos II, "El Hechizado" (The Bewitched).

Today, America, its airwaves awash in 24/7 talk, its waste water awash in scheduled legal and illegal substances, its food supply drowning in herbicide, insecticide, and bovine growth hormone, lurches toward another election seeking a normal, not even a potent President.

Zoe Carey Chamberlain, my Spanish sister-in-law, writes that the world will need a miracle, at least a gift, like quinine, to sail through today's waters. John Quincy Adams wrote whilst passion fills the sails, reason guides the tiller. Each day, the bloody sheep skins come to San Francisco from California's Great Central Valley. Meanwhile, as it has century after century, Zurbaran's *Agnus Dei* whispers from a wall in an otherwise silent room of the Prado.

Note

1. Because the world years ago has, Americans might compare the months our civil air fleet sat on the ground to portion of a single day the Spanish trains did not arrive at Atocha.

DAVID D. BUTLER graduated San Francisco State (B.A.) and Willamette University (J.D.). Upon graduation from law school he, clerked for Justice Mark McCormick, then serving on the Iowa Supreme Court. David D. Butler's law practice includes but is not limited to Criminal Law, Family Law, and Administrative Law.