

Chapter 1

When You're Smiling-

Half-a-mile in half-a-minute

and fun all the way---SteepleChase Amusement Park motto

Unlike the reserved Britons who prefer to be notified most definitely well in advance and preferably by Royal Post of when they are going to have fun and what the projected costs in time and money will likely be, we, as Americans, we are generally under the impression that we are more or less having fun all the time, - for free(!), and therefore only need to be notified when we are about to have to pay for it, or it is going to abruptly stop for some reason. This often devolves to the prehensible consequence (this being the consequence one before reprehensible) that when in fact we are about to be charged for fun, we have the need to class it up with vaguely sophisticated terms like “pavilion”, or “cirque” so that it is imbued either with the necessary attendant gravity or ‘foreignness’ so that it is not regarded mistakenly as mere ambient ‘domestic fun’ which is probably comparatively worthless and for which we should not have to pay. The coining of the term “Pavilion of Fun” to characterize the central edifice of Steeplechase Park in Coney Island therefore was one case in point of this tendency toward hilarious self-deception.

Just as in the pantheon of classical music there are the three ‘B’s, Beethoven, Bach and Brahms, so the pantheon of fun has also its’ own equally alliterative if not equally distinguished iconography; its singularly postprandially depressive porphyriad being composed of; Blackpool, Bickerstaff and Bean. Perhaps the reader has never heard of them? Well then, Blackpool on Hull! Well then, William George Bean!! Alderman Bickerstaff!!! Need I say more? No--. Good!

It was Bean along with his fellow Town Alderman Bickerstaff who in fact constructed the noted Blackpool Pleasure Beach sometime in the late nineteenth century. Perhaps the Blackpuddlians, as they were called then, apparently preferred their Beans without dogs and so it was that the English version of Coney Island while capturing much of the ambience of the original sleazy and self indulgent day trip (leave your money and get out) resort, forgot to include a Nathan’s. In any event, dogless though they were, in 1891 these two reputable but somewhat comically named men, Bean and Bickerstaff were able to found the Blackpool Tower Company, acquiring some forty one acres around an old decrepit pier there in their fond contemplation to lay out an amusement park, one for the masses. The following year a Norwegian ship apparently mistakenly thinking themselves one of those masses, slammed their ship, the “Sirene” into the newly reconstructed pier. The seamen aboard saved themselves after having run aground in the force ten gale, by clambering up the pier’s supports; hence spawning the catchphrases, ‘any amusement park in a storm’ or in the Norwegian version, ‘Every Pier in not a Peer Gynt’. (They were yet just a little early if they were aiming for the roller coaster as that had not been

built yet.)

Just as Coney Island has the parachute drop, that abstracted CGI worthy, creaking, ominously rumbling milliner’s mannikin skeleton of steel that dominates the skyline as you approach New York Harbor from the Atlantic Ocean, Blackpool, the British version had the five hundred eighteen foot high replica of the Eiffel tower which structure likewise was visible from far out on, in this case, the

Irish Sea's Morecambe Bay. The main attraction of Blackpool was denominated "Pleasure Beach" and like SteepleChase on which it was modeled, it was the evident and laudable intent of those in charge of the facility to render at once clear its main purpose to even its most beknighted potential clientele. To reassure the perennially skeptical British and also to any tourists who may have visited the park as it took shape, a British Flag was flown prominently atop the five hundred and nineteen foot Blackpool Tower, this to allay any incipient fears that the nearby mini-Eiffel tower nearby was really the first wave of a perennially anticipated French cultural invasion (which obviously rendered the arrival of the Norwegians, not being notable pleasure seekers, a great surprise).

Blackpool Pleasure Beach is invariably described in English travel brochures as 'brilliant fun', -- no doubt to convey the same intent in case you had already forgotten the point; fun!-- but without gravitas (not gravity)-and to further class it up a bit as well, American style. Ironically, this hyperbole was enthusiastically adopted by the otherwise reserved British funseeking public, whom one would otherwise suspect had no pressing need for smearing the good name of moronic fun with the epithet 'brilliant'. For future, ethno-hilaritographers this latter is called retro-cross pollination, whereas the American habit of appropriation of European spellings and improper nouns is called 'reverse lend lease'.

Blackpool was intended to be a seaside resort mostly for the working class people of adjacent Lancaster and Yorkshire counties. When it officially opened in 1896, the area already had had, (by Blackpool standards), an extensive history as a resort for the Victorian upper classes, but, as their tastes changed they moved to more refined pursuits than the seaside promenades could offer such as parlor games known by such exciting names as 'ball of wool' and 'blowing the feather'. Soon the character of the entertainments changed entirely to accommodate the increasingly working class clientele. Like SteepleChase, Blackpool already had its roller coasters ride and similar attractions but Bean had¹³⁷ wanted to stamp it with his particular character, his imprimatur, to differentiate it from just another seaside resort. To accomplish this aim he decided to style his park more closely on the American entrepreneur, George Tilyou's, recently created SteepleChase. "We wanted an American style amusement park, the fundamental principle of which is to make adults feel like children again and to inspire gaiety of a primarily innocent character". Clearly a reasonable goal—even for a band of frankless British aldermen.

After buying the property and then narrowly avoiding being run over by a stampede of wet Norwegian sailors, they proceeded to model the design to parallel Tilyou's earlier efforts in Brooklyn. Steeplechase had its nod to cultural solidarity and eco-friendlyism in Noah's ark, Blackpool had attractions of only distinctly American derivation like 'Uncle Tom's Cabin with one exception; where Steeplechase had the culturally inspecific 'air tower', Blackpool had the mini- Eiffel Tower. Nevertheless, despite this single exception, this was one of the first documented cases of a British citizen, still utilizing his own name seeking to conspicuously emulate something unequivocally and unapologetically "American". In any event, the reader gets the picture that Blackpool Pleasure Beach in short was modeled on the distinctly American SteepleChase and therefore, it is safe to say, at least in the popular British imagination, -it will probably never live this down.

As for the paradigmatic SteepleChase, the Airship Tower was no doubt its' earliest and most

137 Born on June 6th, 1868, (six years after Tilyou).

prominent and recognizable feature, antedating the parachute drop by some forty years, adorning the earlier postcards, advertising the potential asymptotic fun to be had. Though less visible from afar, its central structure was the aforementioned “Pavilion of Fun” and it was this building that was most identified with it by the later patrons and funseekers of the facility like myself. It was a huge wooden building shaped like an amphitheater and garlanded with an eleven hundred foot, gravity operated, likewise wooden, fully functional, externally braced, simulated horse race, complete with double saddled horses which patrons could ride while idiotically waving at the costumed wooden jockeys adorning the trackside, and jumping hurdles over a real simulated streambed along the way, hence, lending the name, SteepleChase to the entire facility which it circumnavigated. You could hear the boards rattling fiercely from blocks away as the competitive mechanisms jostled their way to a mechanically predestined conclusion drowned out only by the occasional shrieking arrival of the ‘F’ train at Stillwell Avenue.

Bean’s English version of the seaside park only later denominated Blackpool Pleasure Beach was formed from an area known from mediaeval times as the ‘Fylde’. This, and I say this only after the most extensive consultation with several eminent linguists, meant, it was located,--by a ‘field’.¹³⁸ Not just any field-(lest we expect it to fall entirely into graceless anonymity)! In 1970, a huge elk skeleton with a barbed arrowhead embedded in the area around its shoulder was discovered in this field, across the way from the Blackpool Sixth Form College. This was the so called ‘Highfurlong’ elk whose existence proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that men had hunted with relatively advanced weapons in that area, more than eleven thousand years ago. Evidently, they were having brilliant fun there even way back then, except possibly for the Elk, -- (and possibly the lower Furlongs).

Every year, around September 1st, when the days are just getting shorter, there is a poignant display of lights called Blackpool Illuminations that is inaugurated to allow the funseekers to extend their activities just a little further into the cool of the fall evenings, to perambulate along its now six mile long route from the north to the south, sashaying along the glittering seashore where the lights of the seaside resort are reflected in the bay, and its patrons strolling in comfort with the assurance of relative safety. This year former Spice Girl, Geri Halliwell, wearing a miniskirt, will flick the master switch on the illuminations. “Gate Gate Parasamgate OM”. Girl Power! (MotherFlicker).

Though the local residents are loath to admit it, the frivolity of the destination was underscored at first by its being, at least in the popular imagination, located in an area (aside from the Elk) that had somehow escaped the affectionate but sometimes overly enthusiastic ministrations of the purveyors of English myth and tradition. Just as every bit of available land in the Mosel region is utilized as a working viticultural asset, there, in the more pragmatic Rheinland, so, here the British tend to cultivate round each little acre, each square meter, each idle inch with hedges of historical memory, garlands of words that hang unspoken, re-gilded ornate picture frames that coagulate in the cool sea breezes to constantly refocus the fractious collective memory of the British nation on its own singular antiquity.-except of course for Blackpool As such, bereft of the usual pastiche of layer upon layer of edifying pedigree with which their countrymen baste every square inch of available domestic soil as it were a semi-cooked turkey, this lack in itself rendered it worthy of remark. However, when all is said and done, in any case, at least in the case of Blackpool, it is just stubbornly merely ‘a fylde’.

138 There is a second, more radically nominalistic school of thought that takes this to mean rather ‘in a field’.

As for Blackpool's resultant documented comparative lack of either pedigree or usefulness, most of the local residents seem in fact cautiously sanguine in preferring it that way. Indeed, one local resident of Blackpool described it thusly; in a study, with rhetoric worthy of Seneca, and with dissimulation worthy of Bill Clinton, "I cannot recall just how many people have alleged to me that Blackpool has no history; it gives me great satisfaction to prove them wrong. To these doubters I give this question, just what do you mean by Blackpool and secondly what do you mean by history anyway?"¹³⁹ The tower which came to dominate the English amusement park was begun construction in 1891 and opened in 1894. It required yearly, four tons of red lead and a crew of twenty men to maintain it, a fact which partially explains the local historical amnesia and also the comparative lack of rhetorical skills.

In ancient times, this particular area was inhabited by a tribe of early Celts known as 'Brigantes' who were known for the building of vitrified forts. Vitrification is a process whereby (usually) red sandstone is emplaced over a particularly accessible point of a castle, heated, causing it to harden and bond with its neighboring stones, to produce a slippery surface,- difficult to scale. Descendents of these tribes are justifiably proud of this technological advance which often saved them from the predations of marauding Vikings whose shoes were already a bit slippery from stepping on fish guts. Describing this process they record (in perhaps greater detail than is necessary); "It is our proposal therefore that in order to vitrify a fort, ancient man left nothing to chance. Having assessed the melting characteristics of the rock (with a test burn) and acquired additional more suitable facing rock if needed. The Rampart was prepared by the application of the surface stones, together with the addition of a flux-like compound to improve the adhesion and melting characteristics of the rock. Once this was in place, the entire rampart was turned into an enormous kiln, by using clay to build a vented tunnel around the rampart, probably with multiple burning points and flues. This allows the heat to be amplified and directed towards the rampart, thus achieving the even vitrification...noted."¹⁴⁰ In other words, it made one f--king slippery fort.

There was an ancient compound known as "Greek Fire" which was also utilized in this process and which had the unique characteristic that it continued burning even in water. It was sometimes introduced to both to achieve the very high temperatures required for melting the sandstone and also to allow the introduction of water into the vitrifying process as an agent to control the slagging of the surface. This substance was, it is said, the same one used in ancient Greek naval battles and was often then formed into balls to be hurled by catapults at enemy ships, being mostly noted for its capacity to scare the shit out of people. Because of this other capability, (like napalm) to continue burning in water, it was obviously particularly effective as a naval weapon, however, as a sailor you really do not want to watch other sailors burning to death, even if they are the enemy, which is why perhaps its use was discontinued and the secret of its manufacture lost. Thought its exact composition remains unknown, its horrific effects were as well recorded and documented at that time as are those of its modern, (equally unfunny), counterpart, napalm.¹⁴¹

139 "The Regan Chronicles, A Journey Through the History of Blackpool", Terry Regan.

140 BrigantesNation.com.

141 For a more thorough investigation of the weapon, one can refer to Professor J.R. Partington's book, "A history of the Greek Fire and Gunpowder", Heffer, 1960. Theorists have long concluded that such chemicals as liquid petroleum, naphtha, burning pitch, sulphur, resin, quicklime and bitumen, along with some other "secret ingredients" were amongst those employed in its manufacture. It was similar in characteristics if not in consistency to the napalm later used by America in Vietnam and undoubtedly struck the same horror and disgust amongst those it was used against, as well as, peripherally, those using it. The streaming ramparts

Despite the locally prevalent local amnesia, the arrival of the somewhat confused Norwegian sailors did not in actuality mark the beginning of Blackpool's nautical history. In describing these early residents of the area around BlackPool, the modern word 'brigand' is usually employed as a later derivation from the Roman term 'Brigantes' which was their name for the loose agglomeration of mostly Celtic tribes who would harass the Roman forces in coastal areas of otherwise then subject Britain. This word therefore eventually came to imply not only a general lawless attitude but also a certain shiftiness of character and the willingness even eagerness to utilize duplicity for pecuniary aims all while maintaining the appropriate nautical flair. The Brigantes, like their forts, were thus renowned as slippery and they were singularly adept at hit and run raids on their less independent neighbors using small coastwise crafts. . The word "Brigantine" was later adopted into common usage by the Royal Navy in the 17th century, referring to those mostly coast hugging, smaller vessels that easily could change their markings and engage in privateering or even piracy when convenient at a moment's notice.

To trace the term as it evolved further within naval parlance, (yet another case of retro-cross pollination), "A brigantine (the shortened expression is (the modern term) brig)" came to mean a small vessel equipped both for both sailing and rowing, "swifter and more easily maneuvered than larger ships and hence employed for purposes of piracy, espionage, reconnoitering, etc. and as an attendant upon larger ships for protection".¹⁴² This meaning later was broadened to designate any small two masted ship with square rigging having on the main mast, a fore-and-aft mains'il. (A triangular type of sail has an advantage over a square sail of being able to be better maneuver and to allow better sailing of the ship *sic in general*.) Still, the inherent implication of slipperiness remained integral to the new definition as, "It did not take much to convert a square rigged brigantine from use as a merchant ship to use as a privateer, or vice versa.

Privateers have a long history in Atlantic waters. They were generally inclined to avoid pitched naval battles, since the better prize was (a) merchant ship loaded with goods that could be sold or a vessel wounded in one of these engagements and limping home and it was not usually until one of these situations arose that they would raise their true colors.¹⁴³ In any event these entrepreneurs were, on the whole, so successful that it was difficult to keep men with any nautical skills, during the several wars that involved transatlantic fleets or shipping, from deserting the more hazardous and less rewarding military service from joining them. This was a battle the continental army and Washington was constantly obliged to fight seeing as the pay of average Continental foot soldier was raised consistently throughout the conflict from 'bupkis' to nearing the end nearly 'in your grandmother's eye', with a ten dollar bonus, whereas the privateers were making a tidy sum throughout the conflict. This in fact may have been why the attempt to float a continental navy failed at the time.

There is a still existing image that remains ensconced today high in the vaulted ceiling of the church

we gallantly watched in the Star Spangled banner were without doubt almost certainly unvitriified as the method of formulating Greek fire had by then long been lost and napalm had yet to be invented. Greek fire therefore played no real part in the formation of our nation with the exception of course for the phenomenon of Melina Mercouri, who was, aside from being Greece's Prime Minister, was one very hot vitriified babe.

142 "Blupete's Tall Ships". History of Nova Scotia. Blupete.com.

143 By coincidence, one of the first privateers in the revolution were commissioned by John Dyson (who may have been related to the well known for Deputy Mayor of New York, John Dyson who started Millbrook vineyards, in Dutchess County) and another well known privateer of the time Isaac Sears who is not related to Sears of & Roebuck.

of St. Michael the Archangel, at Kirklington, not far from Blackpool in North Yorkshire of a three-headed figure, the central face being certainly that of Ogmios one of the Druidic deities worshipped by these Brigantes. Though there are no other extant post Celtic period images, it is known that Ogmios, usually represented in the middle of a triptych with his extenuated tongue implanted neatly in the ears of the two side facing heads (such as occurs here in the North Yorkshire carving) was the subject of this carving. He was a god associated with strength and eloquence and hence with the Greek god Hercules who also was known to have exhibited the characteristics on occasion of being able to talk his way around a scrape if need be. Sometimes Ogmios was pictured with his tongue becoming a club, the club being the preferred weapon of Hercules. It is also possible that the image, interpreted as his having his tongue inserted into lesser deity's ears is instead a depiction of the links of a gold chain by which their ears were linked to the tip of his tongue implying the power of his speech chained men's minds with golden links. In any event he is also credited with having invented the runes or written form of the Druidic language which is probably why he was granted ear-licking status in the first place. It is also possible, having his tongue coated regularly with the earwax of lesser deities, that he was also the god of throwing up.

In any event, it is known that these early Celtic tribes, such as the Brigantes, living around present day Blackpool, (when they were not vitrifying their ramparts or hunting Elk or earlicking), worshipped a rather eclectic panoply of gods, some Druidic in origin and others derived or modeled after Greco-Roman gods no doubt first introduced by the Roman conquerors who may have frowned on the native forms of worship. It was consequently not all that unusual for these original Celtic deities, over time, to take on some characteristics of their Roman or Greek counterparts and indeed the association of Ogmios with Hercules is fairly well documented.¹⁴⁴

As we may have mentioned, leaving the open sea for the somewhat ambivalent and possibly infectious embrace of Lower New York Bay and shores of Brooklyn, as you make your way to the Howland Hook Marine Terminal at Staten Island, the first thing one notices on the horizon from the deck of a ship is the form of the abandoned parachute drop at SteepleChase Coney Island, a skeletonized finger of fun, pointing rotundly at the sky. The Parachute Jump was bought, (second hand), by George's younger brother Edward Tilyou from the 1939 New York World's Fair. "The ride had been run at the 'Lifesavers' exhibit when it opened for the 1941 season. It stood two hundred and sixty two feet at its tallest point and had twelve chutes, each with a seat that held two passengers. Although tame by the standards of today's rides, the experience of sitting two hundred and fifty feet in the air on a small seat was to say the least, unnerving in that day and age before the mega coasters."¹⁴⁵ One of the early patrons at Steeplechase recounted his experience as follows: "They hooked us in and my father put his arm around me to keep me from falling out...and we began the ascent. The sounds gradually faded away and all we could hear was the wind in the cable. When it hit the top the parachute exploded. It had shock absorbers on the bottom and when it hit the shock absorbers you would bounce and swing like a marionette... It was a dream come true."¹⁴⁶ George Cornelius Tilyou, Steeplechase's founder, was born in New York City in 1862 and so likely had very little personal acquaintance with either Ogmios or any other of the Celtic Gods. Nevertheless, apart

144 We know of the god Ogmios from the writings of Lucian of Samosata, a Greek author who wrote during the 2nd c. AD. We know of the habit of throwing up earwax from Lucy of Sarasota who wrote during the late thong bikini era.

145 AmusementParks.com

146 Charles Denson

from it being 'a dream come true', on experiencing the vertiginous drop, a large portion of the people would vomit on the way down, somewhat slugging the vitirification of enthusiasm of those waiting in line below. –OgmiosSSSushh--.

There is an uncanny similarity of the SteepleChase Funny Face, which adorned the entrance to the now defunct amusement park, with the aforementioned hyper-dentitious image of the Celtic god Ogmios found at St. Michael's Church Kirklington. The Funny Face with its rather vicious grin and super-ordinated teeth and Ogmios were both symbols of oral dominance and intimidation. The trademarked Funny Face with its forty four teeth (twelve more than normal) not only loomed above the entrance but also set the general tone for the park's other attractions. It was a grotesque, diabolical jester that promised fun and hilarity for the park's acolytes (much as Ogmios probably did for the Brigantes). Ogmios himself, (being a god), was probably unlike the 'Funny Face' was never trademarked, (though the Funny Face certainly was) though his image also may have adorned ancient forms of marriage contracts or at least have been invoked for insuring faithfulness.¹⁴⁷ The two hundred foot drop of the parachute ride had a similar effect.

Attendance at the park and the nearby amusements had begun to decline in the early Nineteen Sixties. People increasingly did not want to navigate the gauntlet of drug dealers, prostitutes and 'low lifes' that had gravitated to the three short blocks leading from the IND subway to the beach. In consonance with the admirable, but thoroughly dissolute code of "honor among thieves" that permeated the original mythic Coney Island, this leering jester it seemed made no effort to conceal or distract one's attention this growing problem but instead seemed to increasingly reflect that fact in his own countenance, growing over the years ominous and strange, underscoring the fact that Coney Island despite its veneer of manic fun, was itself on the way to becoming a strange and frightening place where it was not at all safe to wander past the dubious protection of the gaudy amusements lining Surf Avenue. There were no strings of illuminations to make the partrons feel cozier in the ominous twilight. No Haliwell infused Girl Power illuminate the numerous less than savory under the boardwalk assignations.

It was in this period of decline and decay that I visited there. I can distinctly recall after purchasing my tickets for the amusements, slyly sidestepping the alcoholic clown, armed with an electric prod as he herded people over the concealed compressed air vent at the entrance to the Pavilion, the one that blew the women's skirts up and the men's hats off, only to fall prey to the giant rotating barrel that delivered you, deliciously dizzy, into the entrails of the building realizing that all these 'devices' were engineered to impress a visitor at once with the disorienting physical immediacy of the place and it worked 'brilliantly'. Everyone knew about the startling jet of warm noisy air, few knew about the alcoholic clown. Growing up in Brooklyn did have certain advantages but as anyone will tell you one still had to keep ones eyes open to avoid being clubbed or prodded.

The story goes that Joe DiMaggio, (who also grew up in Brooklyn) was physically abusing Marilyn Monroe towards the end of their otherwise storybook marriage. It was even rumored he smacked Marilyn around this occurring on the occasion after they had gotten home from the set where she was filming "The Seven Year Itch" with Billy Wilder. This happened to be the same day Wilder

147 Unfaithful lovers were told to consult Ogmios as they had obviously 'broken their word'. Siclead tablet from Bregen, Austria, Proinsias Mac Cana, [Celtic Mythology](#), pp 35-36, 1996

filmed the famous ‘skirt blowing up’ scene (based on the Steeplechase entry). Reputedly this outburst occurred not because DiMaggio thought the scene itself was improper but because he was embarrassed by her reaction, (which in reality was probably entirely genuine as Marilyn did not know about Wilder’s plan in advance). DiMaggio, -- was a hero, as street smart as any Brooklyn kid, plus he got the girl in the end but, he apparently did not know that people can not control air. Ironically, he just ended up proving that even heroes can sometimes act like stupid alcoholic clowns with cattle prods.

George Cornelius Tilyou, the Park’s founder was, like William Bean, as Freud would later note, also apparently partial to towers. Prior to the parachute drop, two other towers had graced the site; the first the aforementioned Airship Tower which was often depicted on the postcards with zeppelins like a swarm of bees hovering around it, implying in a kind of abbreviated iconography that it was at least partly in the intent of the park’s architects, that it serve in some unofficial, yet immensely important defensive capacity, by directing European airship traffic away from Brooklyn and therefore towards Sandy Hook New Jersey, which again is further evidence of Tilyou’s foresight in protecting Brooklyn’s shores from the twin excesses of European extravagant spelling and aeronautical innovation as both exemplified by the Hindenburg disaster and the subsequent nazification of Blimpies.

By the time I got there, the parachute drop had already been shut down for several years, (either that, or I was too chickenshit to get on, I can’t really remember which,) however, I can distinctly remember the frictionally interminable trip down the giant slide and wondering if the brown color of the slide was the original hue. My elbow was scraped raw by the time I got down the volute that us delivered back to the expansive floor, breathless, unsteady and quietly hysterical, but I didn’t care,--it was ‘brilliant fun’. Later as the sun dropped into the waiting sea, the Chimes tower could be heard chiming the hour like a European cathedral, could be heard throughout the ‘land of fun’. It had the salutary and unfortunate duty of reminding everyone in earshot that even ‘brilliant fun’ must end sometime and that it was time for the rather gritty subway ride back, packed in with sandy beachgoers slowly leaching silica particles onto the read and gray linoleum floor of the subway car, back to the now, inescapably mundane apartment in the interior of that then, still mythic place, called Brooklyn.

Though George Tilyou died in 1914 and his son Edward in 1944, Steeplechase remained a working amusement park up until the financially disastrous season of 1964 when the World’s Fair opened in Flushing Meadows Park. It was this signal event that made it immediately clear to anyone who cared to notice, that the Fair would likely be the amusement to dominate the imagination and consequently the discretionary pocketbooks of the majority of ‘funseekers’ over the next several years. The handwriting was on the wall. Steeplechase closed that year, the same year that the Verrazano Bridge opened,- the year when the path to the future was being touted by a giant steel gazebo, the Unisphere, in Queens and with the new “Rostral” tower,¹⁴⁸ the New York State pavilion, being actually two structures with kind of split personalities, one a tower and the second a rather squat functional structure next to it, the tower being ironically reminiscent of nothing so much as of the parachute drop,¹⁴⁹ lending it somewhat a somewhat schizophrenic sense of metallic déjà vu, or as we

148 Actually this was several identical towers.

149 The tower was left standing but the squat building was dismantled after the fair closed.

prefer to call it in the vineyard, retro-cross pollination.

With this series of events, a cascade heralding the end of the mystical, mythical Brooklyn; the trolley cars gone, the Dodgers also gone, Steeplechase was now too gone, the last of Coney's major playlands, closed forever, a hurdy-gurdy version of "Auld Lang Syne" drifting out over the last die hard beach-goers from the old scratchy loudspeakers seemingly carrying on its back the moribund 'Pavilion of Fun' for a burial at sea, as we tramped our way one last time, back to the now suddenly cramped bowels of the Boro of Brooklyn. The 'unlikely' tower of fun, the parachute drop, that totem pole invested with the forms and fortunes of our dreams and of our past, the platform from which we slowly watched our dreams' billowing descent to the hard earth of Brooklyn, no longer appeared to greet visitors from across the seas with its manic Herculean charm. Steeplechase itself faded into the iconography of extravagant, broken and foreign dreams that littered the Brooklyn streets in that era, falling on puffs of air, like broken teeth from a vacant skull.

In its place of honor, as cultural icon, stood the shining industrial monument to modernity and steel, the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Only the ghostly features of the leering Ogmioslike face remained, hovering for awhile above the entrance on Surf Avenue, advertising the fact that the now vacant old pathways, were no longer beckoning. As the end of Camelot had for old England signified the end of the days of the ancient magic, and as it indeed occurred in America that year before the World's Fair, proving that indeed it was not, so it was in mythic Brooklyn in that year and like the ancient rune stones of Stonehenge now bereft both of power, grandeur and of meaning, still standing guard over ancient holy sites, so stood the skeleton of the parachute drop presiding over that decaying outstretched no longer beckoning finger of fun called Coney Island. Instead, the new bridge's arches beckoned like keyholes in the doorway to a bright and soaring, well engineered future which only opened freely one way and the one way back –for which they had forgotten to make the key.

There is nothing so beautiful as the peaceful shore of Brooklyn after a howling winter North Atlantic crossing, -that much I much can tell you. Even the lights of the otherwise prosaic Belt Parkway, becomes a necklace of jewels around the neck of a beautiful, though perhaps somewhat flat-chested woman, --(or maybe just a rubber band around a hard-boiled egg). This somewhat romanticized feeling lasts until you moor at Howland Hook and you realize they are turning you around for the next run that night and the only place you have time to go for shore leave is for a quick beer at the Polish Legion in Sayreville, New Jersey.

Grapes ripen later than almost any fruit in New York State, except for Fuji apples. In this area that essentially means the beginning of or even mid October as opposed to the end of August for peaches and mid September for most varieties of apples. The autumnal equinox was denominated by the Celts, the 'second harvest', "Alban Elfed" or "Alban Elued" or "light in the water" for the Druids", (the Christian holiday equivalent being St. Matthews day). Obviously having been aware of this tardy ripening characteristic of grapes, the autumnal equinox for the Druids is also known as "the festival of the vine". It is the time that the young god disappears from sight, only to reappear later. As Keats memorialized this time of the year in his poem, "Autumn";

*"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless*

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;”

Somewhat less pastoral is the email I sent to myself while writing this elegiacal chapter:

“Stalin Lyubov social convention, name, medal, fop husband

Ithyphallic grape stomping in the vineyard of liberty

Card talker king, surfer in shit. --How’s that for an evocation of autumn?”

-----It seems I may be angry,--to whit, at least morseo than Keats but then again, Keats never went to Coney Island.)