

## P. Scott Cunningham Reads Jean Genet



*On July 10<sup>th</sup>, poet and Miami Rail contributor P. Scott Cunningham will give a marathon reading of Jean Genet's What Remains of a Rembrandt Torn into Little Squares All the Same Size and Shot Down the Toilet. Artist Nathlie Provosty will introduce the work. The reading begins at 7pm at Gallery Diet.*

### **Is this your first marathon reading?**

I haven't done one, but there are plenty of examples of them. I've heard of 24-hour readings of super long texts like Joyce's *Ulysses* and Frank Stanford's *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*. In comparison this is nothing. It's just a very pleasant reading of a short text.

### **Why Genet?**

Nathlie [Provosty, whose work is currently on display in the gallery] chose this text. I'd never read it before but it's fantastic. She's going to situate the work (in terms of her interest in it) before the reading so hopefully it will all make sense then.

### **Can you provide a short précis of the piece?**

It's two short texts, presented side-by-side on the paper that we will read consecutively, left side first then right side. The left side is Genet describing an experience he had on a train in which, looking at a man whose physical appearance disgusts him, he suddenly realizes that they are one in the same person. The right side is Genet thinking about Rembrandt.

**With readings, not to speak of marathon readings, there is a degree of pleasant captivity. It's the rare occasion where one can't easily disengage from a work until it is finished. Genet is a great fit for this, because if one were to set up an erotics of incarceration, his name would surely come up. I'm thinking of *Our Lady of the Flowers*, which Genet secretly wrote in prison. A guard discovered the manuscript, it was burned, and Genet had to rewrite the entire thing. Can you think of some other works that were written under duress, or should be forced upon the reader?**

Under duress, well, I'd say that covers a pretty good portion of important 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature. Works from the Holocaust for instance, particularly Paul Celan's "Todasfugue" and (this isn't literature but it's a great example) Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. Neither of these works needs be forced on a

reader, as in ways contrary to how they were made, both are disturbingly pleasant. Much of what we think of as “great literature” is literature that requires great effort to absorb: *Finnegans Wake*, Pound’s *Cantos*, *Infinite Jest*, etc. All of us beat ourselves up that we haven’t read certain “classics.” Personally, I force myself to read certain books by buying them and placing them in prominent places in my house where they will shame me on a daily basis. I’m pretty sure I’m not alone in this kind of self-flagellation. In that light, the marathon reading is a kind of public service. All you have to do is show up and you can check off a great work from your infinite list.

**You’ll also be reading some of your own work. Have you decided which piece?**

Actually, in answering the last question, I think I just decided. One of those works that people force themselves to absorb is Morton Feldman’s *String Quartet No. 2*, which can last up to five hours, depending on how fast it’s played. I wrote a poem that’s half abridged version of the piece, and half lyrical delusion about the inherent mundanity of writing something as long as a five-hour score (or a 150,000-word novel, or 40,000-word poem, etc.). If you read accounts of people who have attended live concerts of *String Quartet No. 2*, they all talk about this ecstatic moment that happens about 3.5 hours in, which could be attributed to the piece itself or to the exhaustion of attempting to concentrate for 3.5 hours. Who can tell? When people criticized Feldman for writing long scores with one moment of real lyric beauty in them, he’d say, ‘How many more do you need?’ It’s the mirror image of something like Schoenberg’s *Ewartung*, which is an attempt to make a single second of ecstasy last for 30 minutes. Music can only enact time, but one of the fun things you can do in a poem is talk *about* time. And that’s what it’s all about right? If we had an infinite amount of time allotted to us, we wouldn’t stress about reading *Ulysses*.