



Cinful

by Michael Nagrant

“YOU KNOW JERRY SPRINGER? I’VE INHALED WITH HIM MORE THAN A FEW TIMES,” says Ed, a displaced Cincinnati architect nursing a glass of red wine at the end of the bar. On my left, a barrel-chested buzz-cut man, another former Queen City native, a national guardsman about to be deployed to Afghanistan, reminisces about lazy afternoons watching Pete Rose and the Big Red Machine at Riverfront stadium. The transplanted faithful are out in force on the first Saturday night of Lincoln Square’s new Cincinnati-style chili parlor and lounge, Cinner’s.

In the center, behind the bar, back-dropped by black-and-white photos of Cincinnati Reds greats like the “old lefthander” pitcher Joe Nuxhall and front-lit by a trio of red Ikea pendant lamps, is owner Tony Plum, an itinerant restaurant-and-bar-industry vet, and of course, a Cincy boy. With a black shag of wet ringlets, a sharp aquiline nose and a wiry form, he looks a little like Tommy Lee.

Like Lee, he’s also fairly tattooed, though there’s no baroque barbed wire, fierce animals or imitation tribal markings. Plum prefers works of art. There’s Picasso’s “Old Guitarist” and Michelangelo’s “Hands of God” detail from the Sistine Chapel on his left arm, Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” on his left leg and Dali’s “Christ of St. John of the Cross” on his right torso, a nod to the fact that he spent the last decade as a visual artist. Plum was also a singer-songwriter fronting California bands P.S. Chambers and Karmic Book Heroes. Asked how he went from singing to slinging chili, he jokes, “I got too old for the rock ‘n’ roll lifestyle.”

His real reason for coming to Chicago, though, was that he got tired of California and wanted to get back to his Midwestern roots. Settled in to the Windy City, he still hankered for a piece of his childhood home: a good bowl of Cincy chili.

Chili parlors in Cincy are as ubiquitous as beef stands in Chicago. The lore is Greek immigrants Tom and John Kiradjieff began serving Cincinnati chili in 1922 at their hotdog stand located next to a burlesque theater called the Empress. The basic recipe, which includes finely ground beef boiled with sweet spices like chocolate, cinnamon and allspice, was tweaked and popularized by former Empress chef Nicholas Lambrinides when he launched Skyline Chili, which along with Gold Star, is one of the two most popular parlors in Cincy (though my personal favorite is the bowl at Camp Washington).

While Chili was most definitely a city thing, for Plum it was a family affair. Plum says his great-grandfather, a cop, used to frequent the original Empress after completing his beat. One night his great-grandfather allegedly asked the Kiradjieff’s for their recipe “so my wife can make it at home.” Plum says, “Back then, no one cared. No one knew how big it would be. So they gave it to him.” The recipe was handed down through family members, and now that Plum has it, he’s giving it to Chicago.

I’ve never been to the Empress, so I don’t know how close Tony’s recipe is, but I do know my Cinci chili. I had my first bowl four years ago, when my good friends Aamir Burki and Alex Strum (a native Cincinnati) cooked up a bowl for my wife Christina and me from a recipe from Alex’s father Barry. (In the foreword to his typewritten recipe, a gift for his daughter when she went to college, he wrote “Never forget where you came from.”)

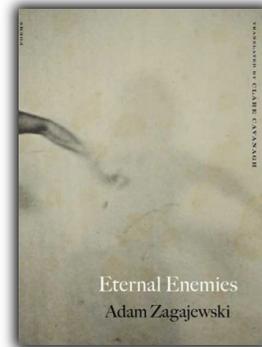
That first bowl was nothing like the rugged testosterone-fueled and chili-infused Texas-style hunk of beef stew I’d known. It was a delicate sauce perfumed with allspice and kissed with chocolate and served over spaghetti with cheese (aka: three-way). This bowl was also the basis for a rotating series of dinners that continues five years later between our now burgeoning families which include our two sons born two months apart last year.

After that, whenever I’d get within a hundred miles of Cincy, I’d find a Skyline or a Gold Star. In Chicago, I searched, but was routinely disappointed by those claiming an authentic bowl, until I’d found the Ramova Grill’s sweet-spiced Greek-style chili.

And while the Ramova Grill version is pretty damn close, Plum’s version (I like mine five-way—which also includes onions and beans) is better. It’s got a richness and heat that no other local version has. The spaghetti is cooked to a perfect fresh al dente noodle, and the red beans on top are firm and smooch satisfyingly as you bite into them.

The only quibble I had with Plum’s version is that the beef chunks were a little thick. Though it doesn’t make any difference to me or the flavor, most Cincy parlors serve an extremely saucy version where the beef has been pulverized to dust. Plum says this is a conscious choice, as Chicagoans are used to a meatier brew and he didn’t want to completely startle them. He expects that as things play out, he’ll work toward a finer meat grind as the business matures.

Cinner’s is located at 4757 North Talman, (773)654-1624.



Your Enemies, Closer

FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD, ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI HAS BEEN ON THE MOVE. Decisions made at the Yalta Conference forced his family out of Lvov, Poland. They left on cattle cars for the grim industrial city of Gilwice, formerly of

Germany. To the young poet, growing up in the shambling, destroyed corner of Europe, Lvov became a lost place, a magical city—the architecture of memory itself. The nearly twenty books Zagajewski has published in various languages as he moved to Krakow, then in exile to Paris, then again to Houston, all attempt to walk the streets of this lost city. But the best of his work does more than meander in mourning.

“Some poems and pictures will live on,” he wrote in his 2000 memoir, “Another Beauty”: “But who will revive the moments and hours?” This has been the task Zagajewski set himself as a poet. “Eternal Enemies,” his latest collection to be translated into English by Slavic language scholar Clare Cavanaugh, shows he is still one of the best in the world at it. The book features the usual assortment of Zagajewski poems—stunning, imagistic remembrances of childhood; elegies to poets; glancing snapshots of life on the move, the poet’s internal eye-roving, yet always returning to the past. As in Proust, this journey is far more than a ritual. It is a metaphysical meditation so yearning it feels like prayer. The volume begins with “Star,” a short poem in tribute to “the gray and lovely city...buried in the waters of the past,” then continues with a series of short sketches, “En Route,” which remind that all movement, especially for an exile, is a flight towards home, even if the direction is away.

Zagajewski is a superb phrasemaker, his lines full of arresting similes and compact metaphors. In “Stolarska Street” he writes of how his home lives on: “it remains concealed/in my heart like a starving deserter/in an abandoned circus wagon.” He remembers the emptiness of the city on Sundays: “in the afternoon the city slept,/mouth open, like an infant in a stroller.” Zagajewski is so good at painting scenes one almost wishes he limited himself to that. Occasionally, he will reach for a profound truth and wind up on that flatter plane of cliché: “the future cries in us,” he writes in “Describing Paintings,” “and its tumult makes us human.” Zagajewski acknowledges how hard it is not to fail like this writing poetry. “The territory of truth/is plainly small,” he writes in “Self-Portrait, Not Without Doubts,” “narrow as a path above a cliff. Can you stick/to it?”

Far more than most, he can. Here are dense, private moments—lovers driving in a car, cities in rare afternoon light of solitude—revealed, as only can be done, in poetry. Zagajewski is plainspoken about how he does it. “I read poems, listen to the mighty whisper/of night and blood.” How odd that an exile’s manifesto can sound so much like happiness. (*John Freeman*)

“Eternal Enemies”

by Adam Zagajewski (translated by Clare Cavanaugh)
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$24, 128 pages

words

READINGS

THU/10

James Naremore

The author discusses "More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts."

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State, (312)747-4300. 6pm. Free.

→ Lifeline Theatre Benefit: Amy Sedaris

The author of "I Like You: Hospitality Under the Influence" hosts a benefit for Lifeline Theatre, signing copies of her book, giving craft demonstrations and holding a Q&A on "hospitality techniques."

Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington, (312)744-6630. 6:30pm-10:30pm. \$100.

FRI/11

Nancy Goldstein

The author discusses "Jackie Ormes: The First African-American Woman Cartoonist."

Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.

SAT/12

Mike Adams

The author discusses "Toilet Bowl Soup."

Quimby's, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm. Free.

MON/14

Cass Sunstein

The author discusses his latest work, "Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, & Happiness."

International House, 1414 E. 59th, (773)753-2270. 6pm. Free.

Judith Freeman

The author reads from "The Long Embrace: Raymond Chandler and the Woman He Loved."

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State, (312)747-4300. 6pm. Free.

Rebecca Fannin

The author reads from "Silicon Dragon: How China is Winning the Tech Race."

Barbara's Bookstore, UIC, (312)222-0890. 7:30pm. Free.

TUE/15

Ann Wright

The author and Army Colonel discusses "Dissent: Voices of Conscience: Government Insiders Speak Out Against the War in Iraq."

Barbara's Bookstore, UIC, (312)222-0890. 7:30pm. Free.

Mental Graffiti

Featuring Tim Stafford, Joel Chmara, Dan Sullivan, Bill Tuggle and Emily Rose.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago, (312)280-2660. 6:30pm. Free.

Michael L. Levin

The author discusses "The Next Great Clash."

International House, 1414 E. 59th, (773)753-2270. 6pm. Free.

WED/16

Get Born Reading

Contributors to the monthly book of poetry read from their work.

Quimby's, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm. Free.

Gregg Shapiro, Scott Free, LaNita Joseph

The poets read from their work.

Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7pm. Free.

Pico Iyer

The author discusses "The Open Road: The Global Journey of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama."

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State, (312)747-4300. 6pm. Free.

Poetry Off the Shelf: Lorna Dee Cervantes, Rigoberto Gonzalez

The poets read from their work.

Center on Halsted and Horizons Community, 3656 N. Halsted. 6pm. Free.

action

EVENTS

Anal Pleasure 201: The Advanced Class

A workshop led by award-winning author Tristan Taormino dedicated to "the ins and outs of anal play." Early to Bed, 5232 N. Sheridan, (773)271-1219. Tue 7pm. \$25.

Dating for Nerds: Earth Day Edition

Be nerdy, be green, find love. J. Patrick's Irish Bar & Grill, 1367 W. Erie, (312)243-0990. Wed 10pm. \$20-\$25.

International Quilt Festival

Featuring more than a hundred educational classes, dozens of demonstrations and more than 500 vendors and booths, the International Quilt Festival showcases quilt art from around the world. Donald E. Stephens Convention Center, 5555 N. River Rd., Rosemont, 847-692-2220. Fri-Sun.

Teen Arts Expo

More than 300 of the city's teenagers display their skills in the arts, in mediums such as jazz dance, storytelling, theater improv, glass-etching and more. South Shore Cultural Center, 7059 S. South Shore, (773)256-0149. Fri 11am-4pm.

TALKS

TUE/15

Raymond Chandler's Influence

A panel discussion featuring authors Judith Freeman and Achy Obejas, plus journalist Pico Iyer. Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State, (312)747-4300. 6pm, Free.

WED/16

Wolves: Back from the Brink of Extinction

A panel discussion focused on the "reintroduction" of wolves. Lincoln Park Zoo, 2200 N. Cannon, (312)742-2000. 7pm, \$20.

For details on readings, book discussions, film series and other special events, pick up a copy of the resource guide at your local library or bookstore, visit chicagopubliclibrary.org or call (312) 747-8191.

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