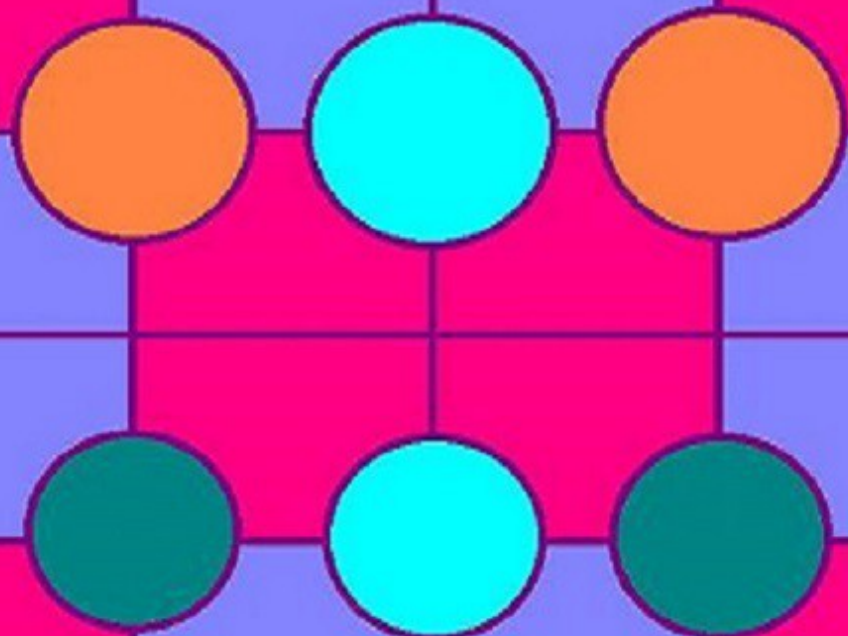


LOGAN'S INFLUENCE



J O'L - 28/9/99

JOHN O'LOUGHLIN

LOGAN'S INFLUENCE

Or

CARNAL SACRIFICE

By

JOHN O'LOUGHLIN

Of Centretruths Digital Media

CDM Prose

This edition of *Logan's Influence* first published 2011 and republished with revisions 2022 by Centretruths Digital Media

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ISBN: 978-1-4466-4623-6

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CHAPTER ONE

Keith Logan hadn't been to a party in years and, now that he had met the hostess and been escorted into the tightly packed room where the festivities were taking place, he felt curiously shy and embarrassed, like a young adolescent on his first date. The room was certainly more crowded than expectations had led him to believe, and with the crowd went the noise of chatter and laughter, occasional coughs and shouts, elaborate gestures and sudden jerks.

Casting around for psychological support amidst the welter of strange faces, Logan's gaze fell upon the rather large head of the art critic Martin Thurber, and he immediately set about drawing the man's attention with a clear if rather brief wave of his hand, which, as if by a miracle, duly produced positive results. It was Thurber who had invited him along to the party in the first place, so it was only proper that the one familiar and vaguely sedate face in the room should act as a kind of life-support harness and straightaway come floating to his rescue through the choppy sea of animated faces swimmingly at large there. The hostess, who had so promptly answered the door to him a moment before, was already being pulled away by the call of duty to answer it to someone else, leaving Logan stranded in her turbulent wake just inside the large brightly lit drawing room in which he now floundered. Hence the curious shyness and embarrassment which had so suddenly descended upon him, in the absence of his customary self-confidence.

But Martin Thurber was coming to his rescue, brimming over, it appeared, with self-confidence and pleasure. "So glad you could make it, Keith," he announced, extending what seemed like a life-saving hand to the nearest shoulder of the new arrival and gently patting it a few times. "I was beginning to fear you weren't coming."

Logan smiled in an ambivalent cross between apology and reassurance at the fair-haired, clean-shaven face in front of him, the light-blue eyes of which twinkled mysteriously and even a shade mischievously, it seemed to him, in the festive atmosphere. It was a wonder to himself that he *had* actually come, since the prospect of visiting this Highgate house

unaccompanied, and without any foreknowledge whatsoever of who or what he would encounter there, had more than once cast a serious shadow of doubt over his prior resolution to turn up. But to have backed down at the last moment, after he had assured Thurber of his pressing desire to attend, would hardly have contributed towards the friendship which had recently sprung-up between them and, since he had precious few friends anyway, he thought it expedient not to disappoint the poor fellow. "I didn't want to turn up too early," he averred, following the termination of his ambiguous smile.

"And no difficulty finding your way here, I trust?" Thurber remarked.

"Nothing to grumble about," Logan declared.

"Good." Thurber's eyes twinkled in an even more mysterious, not to say mischievous, fashion. He was just about to add some banality about no address being easier to find when a burst of piercing laughter from a group of revellers to their left interrupted the flow of his thoughts, inducing him, instead, to say: "Well, now that you've arrived, allow me to introduce you to our host."

A few yards to their right a well-groomed, silver-haired man of average build but more than average height was standing on the edge of one such group, gracefully chatting to an attractive young woman with light-green eyes who peered into his handsome face like a person intent upon discovering the secrets of the universe there. It was towards him that Thurber boldly advanced, dragging his reluctant acquaintance along by the sleeve.

"Allow me to introduce a highly talented novelist by name of Keith Logan," he respectfully interposed, compelling the man's attention. "Keith, this is Edward Hurst, our magnanimous host!"

Hurst smiled magnanimously before extending a rather clammy hand, which the newcomer dutifully clasped. "Delighted to meet you," he announced, focusing a sharp pair of dark-grey eyes upon the latter's aquiline nose. "I've heard a little about you from Martin, though I haven't yet got round to reading any of your books. But let me introduce you to someone who may have – Miss Greta Ryan, who is something of a writer in

her own way."

He was of course referring to the attractive young woman beside him, whose attention had, in the meantime, shifted down a gear, so to speak, in its change of direction. She extended a slender hand and smiled shyly through a moist pair of sensuous lips. "I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you too," she confessed, as Logan tentatively responded to her gesture. "I'm only familiar with your name; though I understand you mostly write, er, nonsense, if that's the right word?"

Logan blushed slightly and emitted a gentle self-deprecatory laugh. "Not quite nonsense in the usual sense," he insisted. "But certainly novels that make no sense."

"He's purely an abstractionist," Thurber revealed, coming to his social rescue again. "So what he writes is senseless from a representational or, rather, narrative and descriptive standpoint."

"Oh really?" Hurst exclaimed in a show of surprise mingled with incredulity. "Whatever next?" He gulped down a mouthful of wine before adding, on a slightly reproachful note: "All of which leads one to assume that your novels are completely unreadable?"

"Not 'completely'," Logan responded a shade despondently. "It's just that what you read doesn't tell you anything. It simply makes you conscious of words, of their sound and symbolic nature."

The dark-haired woman to whom he had just been introduced wanted to know why readers should be made conscious of the 'sound and symbolic nature' of words instead of being told a story, as with most novels. It didn't quite make sense to her, she confessed.

"It's not supposed to make sense!" Hurst facetiously reminded her.

"No, in actual fact it only makes sense from a philosophical and avant-garde angle," said Logan, briefly turning towards Greta. "I mean it's doubtless right, at this juncture in time, that the more progressive writers should be engaged in exploring the tools, so to speak, of their trade rather than simply constructing traditionally-inspired literary works out of them."

We've got beyond the purely representational stage of literature and are busily exploring abstract or non-narrative possibilities, in accordance with the transcendental *Zeitgeist* of the age, which, in my opinion, stems from the radically artificial influence of the urban environment. We've been exploring such possibilities since at least the beginning of the century, and until we transcend literature, not to mention art and music, altogether, we shall continue to explore them, in the interests of progress."

"Even to the extent of writing meaningless novels?" Hurst queried, less the magnanimous host than the sceptical critic.

"Absolutely," Logan confirmed, nodding bravely. "For, as we evolve to a higher and more spiritual level of life, so we must get beyond symbols, transcend words and their meanings, in order to penetrate to the pure truth which lies ahead of us, and thus attain to the goal of our evolution in spiritual bliss – total enlightenment."

This opinion could hardly be expected to win much approval from people like Edward Hurst and Greta Ryan, who were already a trifle tipsy and therefore not particularly interested in hearing what a sober abstract novelist had to say concerning the justification of his craft. If Logan had arrived an hour or two earlier, the people concerned might have been a shade more ...