Restoring
Lady
Liberty
Other Titles by Eric Paul Shaffer

kindling: Poems from Two Poets
   Longhand Press, 1988; co-author, James Taylor III

RattleSnake Rider
   Longhand Press, 1990

How I Read Gertrude Stein by Lew Welch
   Grey Fox Press, 1996

Instant Mythology
   Backer Editions, 1999

Portable Planet
   Leaping Dog Press, 2000

Living at the Monastery, Working in the Kitchen
   Leaping Dog Press, 2001

You Are Here
   Obscure Publications, 2004

Lāhaina Noon: Nā Mele O Maui
   Leaping Dog Press, 2005

The Felony Stick
   Leaping Dog Press, 2006

Road Sign Suite: Across America and Again
   Obscure Publications, 2007

Burn & Learn, or Memoirs of the Cenozoic Era
   Leaping Dog Press, forthcoming 2009
Restoring
Lady Liberty

Eric Paul Shaffer

OBSCURE PUBLICATIONS
for all mothers,
metaphorical and otherwise,
and for all of mine

Homage to Hart Crane

"A prophet is not without honor,
save in his own country."
— Matthew 13:57
Declaration

When *Liberty Enlightening the World* arrived in the United States of America in 1885, the massive copper pieces and iron frame were stacked and stored in their wooden shipping crates while Americans decided what to do with such a challenge. Many did not welcome the arrival of Bartholdi's gift. The statue was another immigrant with nowhere to go. There was no place to put it. There were no funds to assemble or maintain it. Even the name made little sense and was changed for our shores.

Not unlike the statue, *Restoring Lady Liberty*, written in 1986 for the Centennial of the Statue of Liberty, has remained in manuscript a long time before publication, even a few years more than the twenty-one that passed between the conception and the erection of the statue.

He who wrote these words and the nation in which they were written are ever-changing, yet the words remain true to those days and my life at the time I wrote them. Some of the optimism looks a little naïve now, and there is more irony in the construction of the lines than I meant or could mean when I wrote them, but that might be true of any of us after nearly a quarter of a century.

Nevertheless, I welcome the opportunity to present the poem to my fellow citizens and to affirm the embattled yet enduring promise of our nation.

Eric Paul Shaffer
Honolulu, HI
June 3, 2009
I. Preamble

"The symbols mean nothing if the values aren't there."
— Lee A. Iacocca

already Classic Coke cans litter the shore of Liberty Island
cigarette butts, bits of chewing gum foil, anonymous scraps of paper
among melting jellyfish, brown bulbs of seaweed, driftwood,
the refuse of America afloat
by the bow of the immigrant ship unloading
into the multilateral fortress beneath Lady Liberty’s feet

for beginnings and new roads west in/to America
the sun paves the roads gold rising or setting
and everything under the sun is new
in the city named New in memory of land left across the sea
and the island beneath the sidewalks and streets

in the early morning jump-and-run through angles and intersections
the crowd crushes between lines painted corner to corner
crosses the street against the light —
all the faces filing past, filing themselves away, arrive just in time
to scorch the tongue on hot coffee from a mug
proclaiming, "DON’T ASK ME!! I ONLY WORK HERE!!"

and my work
to write
a timely poem of current events
and my country
right or wrong
’tis of thee
I must speak
sweet land of liberty
of thee I sing
for when we let freedom ring
the bell broke
splitting the lip
before speaking clearly once
from sea to shining sea.
II. Bill of Rights

"The dictum that truth always triumphs over persecution, is one of those pleasant falsehoods which men repeat after one another till they pass into commonplaces, but which all experience refutes."
— John Stuart Mill

"beauty is a defiance of authority"
— William Carlos Williams

authority is always the problem —
except for the government claiming all power
the citizens neglect —

and I am just one more American willing to speak for all:
meaning authority comes from the maker’s hands remaking or renewing or restoring all alone —

here I will draw my line
and cross America claiming free speech once more for myself and my country —

our language alone can free us in a land of progressive tense, progressive in the sense of process, not Progress,

progressive meaning a noun and a verb happening all at once always making, yet never made always restoring, yet never restored
always speaking, yet never completely spoken
America
realizing any ordinary moment imaginatively
is poetry

I claim my own voice
for Lady Liberty is not my muse
and I make no appeal to her or anyone
but those Homer knew as “the silent majority” —

I claim the lives of those dying
to preserve my freedom (as I was taught)
and to speak for them,
to write now right now
mourning the dead missing
the freedoms the living refuse

declaring all of these died for me, for poetry,
for you, and for Lady Liberty
to hear these words
and I must do no less than speak
in their honor

in the ringing silence of freedom.
III. State of the Union Address

“Great men before great monuments express great truths, provided they are not taken too solemnly.”
—Henry Adams

“Freedom is just the ticket of admission, but if you want to survive and prosper, there’s a price to pay.”
—Lee A. Iacocca

“and God said unto them,
‘Be fruitful, and multiply,’”
and Americans know multiplication means products so they built themselves
a myth of prosperity
taking the properties of numbers
and numbers of properties in vain
from those who didn’t recognize them
or their gods until forced to see

the greaspaint grin of Ronnie Mac, Clown
Father of America, conceals
King George’s wooden teeth
in the face of President Shooting Star
a visage pickled in the gorge

of a New Conservative Wave
gathering to a head on the President
ageless and awash in some Grecian Formula
(probably Plato’s Republic—
yes, Ronnie Mac would toss out poets too)—

now Lady Liberty’s gone green
and freedom’s moved to another state
with no forwarding address
deserting her in her silver cage
to lift her lamp beside the bolted door—
"Liberty Enlightening the World"
designed to celebrate the Centennial of America
arrived ten years after the party
and the magnificent and monstrous monument
had no place to stand

the carpet-baggers kept their cash
claiming insufficient funds
allowing Lady Liberty be raised
from the pennies of schoolchildren
who purchased a place to place her pedestal

"a common work of both nations" —
after Bartholdi scrapped "Progress" on the Suez Canal
and sent "Liberty" instead
for, as Laboulaye said, "Progress is nothing
but liberty in action" —

the French kept a quarter-scale model
to remind themselves
Lady Liberty's presence was enough
and size was not important
though New York's nouveau riche did not agree —

Lady Liberty's design
comes from men
loving their mothers to abstraction:
Bartholdi gave Liberty his mother's face
a stern, stiff-lipped, silent stare

and Gustave Eiffel built the iron frame
for the copper garment of the goddess
and later the eponymic phallic tower —
power rising straight to Heaven
to rival the strength of America's Magna Mater —

R.M. Hunt designed four-square feminine dimensions
for the pedestal on which to put up Lady Liberty
and General Charles P. Stone opened the earth
through old fortifications
into the original soil of the New World
making the foundation solid on the grounds
that to overturn Lady Liberty
the island must be ripped from the planet
by some catastrophe
beyond human imagination until 1945 —

Lady Liberty was the only woman present
at her unveiling in a man’s world
with women circling the Statue in an open boat
announcing her arrival
with megaphone ceremonies of their own

for Lady Liberty is an allegory,
her symbols clashing in the nation’s ear,
indelibly legible
to any citizen who looks carefully,
angling for a national point of view

even from across the Atlantic
Laboulaye remarked Lady Liberty
“does not hold an incendiary torch
but a beacon
which enlightens” —

Edison invented the light bulb
to brighten Lady Liberty’s head
and chase shadows across the sea —
there she stood over the harbor waves
just glowing her brains out

till Gutzon Borglum, a man good with symbols
of freedom in stone
carved away the copper of the torch
revealing the flame
for all to see

no one admires Lady Liberty from New York —
she keeps her back to America —
only from a boat can you see
her design to impress the oppressed
from farther shores —
Joseph Pulitzer was one
printing names in his newspaper for cash donations
since freedom means more
to those who pay for passage from another land
and they'll rally 'round raising the copper colossus

but even J.P. couldn't take America's temperature
giving The World orders from a boat
 beyond the island and the land
where The Times reports today
 the hard-hatted crawlers

working through the folds of Lady Liberty
 pissed in her face
 rather than climb down the scaffolding —
 page 2 reports "The Star-Spangled Banner" offends
Professor Titcomb because the words are militaristic

and the melody stolen from an English drinking song —
America, if we are what we drink, what we toast
 and what we eat,
 are we so easily cowed
 because we've eaten billions of McBurgers?

Remember the respectable refusing to pay even once,
 while others provided the pennies,
 admitted themselves to exclusive ceremonies of freedom
 as we, the people of the pavement,
 crowded the shore, regarding Lady Liberty from a distance —

and now, we're following fifty feet of Mobile HomeLand
towing all the comforts they can barely afford
 along a crowded freeway
 (all other possessions safely secured
 in barbed-wire rental space at American Self-Storage) —

 lawn chairs, moped, and on a trailer, a compact car
 with a bumper sticker aglow in the twilight's last gleaming,
 leaving it all behind with a curse
 for the survivors and centuries to come:
 "WE'RE SPENDING OUR CHILDREN'S INHERITANCE."
IV. National Anthem

"We are proud of our corporate sponsors. The Statue of Liberty stands for everything America is ... the capitalist system with appropriate use being made of commercialism."
— Steven Briganti

"Why not? This is the Statue of Liberty. You know: Mom, apple pie, the flag — and big bucks."
— Anne English

"Merchants have no country. The mere spot they stand on does not constitute so strong an attachment as that from which they draw their gains."
— Thomas Jefferson

"Lady Liberty sells: shirts, lunch-boxes, and bells, gold pencils and pens, an assortment of knick-knacks; an oak Grandfather Clock with a gold door and lock engraved with her face and her dates of dominion; her gold pendulum swings, silver chime inside rings, as each hour flies, Lady Liberty sings."

The U.S. Mint will sell you a half-dollar for just $7.50, a silver buck for $24, a set for seven bucks more.

Swizzle sticks and beer steins, a gold Liberty mug, a bear in green gown and a milk chocolate statue, big red Styrofoam torch, cardboard Liberty mask, stamps, patches, and pins, and green spiked-crown sunglasses, that aquarium there, among striped fish, her glare, red, white, and blue stones for her submarine lair.

Torch erasers and charms (metal and plastiform),
pajamas and plates, and embossed stationery;
an alarm clock for sale — Liberty drawn to scale
    with gold minute hand, and her torch tells the hour;
    pretzels in a tin can,
    a jack-knife for your man,
    jigsaw-puzzle proof the Green Lady still stands.
If you like dirty pictures, I've got some here beneath the counter:
    Lady Liberty disrobes with Colossus of Rhodes.”
V. Independence Day

"Is this the Fourth?"

— Thomas Jefferson, his last words, July 4, 1826

"Thomas Jefferson still survives."

— John Adams, his last words, later the same day

the reports of shots fired
over two hundred years ago
resound in streets and alleys
roads and highways
all over America today
celebrating the Centennial of Lady Liberty
with blasts of beans
beer, burgers, banners, and bombs
bursting
to invent a tradition rather than cultivate one
in a reverence for the land
we live on
watching in living-room-size blocks of ice-blue TV light
a fat pack of wealth and status quo
rehearsing themselves
for the benefit of millions
overlooking the chains shattered at her feet
ignoring
the shackles hidden by her gown
forgetting a chain
is a chain is a chain is a chain
whether iron or bronze, silver or as gold
as the streets
where too few Americans live
waiting for the night
to light their fireworks.
VI. Inauguration Address

"Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles . . ."
— Emma Lazarus

"I must write again to say how much I like your sonnet
about the Statue — much better than I like the Statue itself."
— James Russell Lowell

"Crown'd with a helmet & dark hair
the nameless female stood"
— Blake

the Titan Atlas was my sire
condemned
to cradle the world
on weary shoulders,
his muscles maps of his strength and his struggle,
bunched beneath the burden —
after the War of Heaven and Earth
tore the two asunder,
for warring well against the victors,
he was condemned
to crouch beneath the circumference
by Zeus, God the Father to the Greeks,
who place all their wonders far
in the West
and so contrived to place us here,
keeping their reckless gods safely across the sea
in the sky or underground,
converting culture to logic
to justify themselves —

the night Perseus arrived
I held high the torch
to greet the rare visitor

"silent she stood
as night"
— Blake
with the joy
reserved for great occasions —
charged by Hera to guard
the golden apples,
those tokens of love
to celebrate the foolish
celestial marriages of gods and men,
my sisters and I saw few
who did not come to steal the gilded fruit.

since Herakles, we were wary of visitors
for he tricked my father
into resuming his burden
after Atlas rejoiced to be set free,
yet once more,
the Titan groaned beneath the globe

but Perseus pitying
raised the Gorgon Medusa’s head
in the light my torch cast
so Atlas might be turned to stone
beneath the weight of the Earth
and I, not meaning
to see
that hideous face, the writhing, hissing hair,
the tongue split as a serpent’s
tongue worming with a serpent’s grace,
my voice, too, grew still
where I stood on the last of the land
this island once was,
and still I remain

alone
till searching the West without the maps
my father’s arms
now seem to mean
the descendants of the Greeks —
in thought
if not in thew —
discovered me here
my green breast
the promise of a new world
defined
in the dreams of an old one
and guarded by giants
of new imagination
newly arrived
long ages after
the ward and reward are gone.

“sleep and stir not:
  all is mute”
— Tennyson
VII. The Constitution of the United States

"Eiffel's hidden structural reality is totally unrelated to the statue's very traditional appearance. Liberty is an archetypal illustration of the aesthetic tension of its time — when technology had already attained great advances and power and a hold over the mind, but when the conscious eye was still dominated by traditional imagery."

— Marvin Trachtenberg

what we can learn from the body

of Lady Liberty
are the lessons of building
the genetics of freedom
a double-helix stairway
winding up in the lofty head
standing on the imaginary
copper tongue empowering speech free
or your money back
proclaiming, "It's a free country!"
with every single voice
rightfully raised

what we can learn from the body

a flexibility absolutely necessary
for the magnitude
and complexity
of the structure as it stands
yielding enough
to remain standing
as long as the copper skin waves
in the wind
flexing on the single-bar strapwork
supporting each section —
the weight of Liberty
resting on her iron and concrete frame
independently
and not on the parts below

what we can learn from the body

a 2.5 millimeter thin skin
another good idea
for making Liberty lighter
and more sensitive to sudden changes
in wind and weather
over the waves and the world
and through the folds in her garment

what we can learn from the body

more than half the stature
of Liberty
arises from where she stands
and what she stands on
151 feet, 1 inch tall
and still growing
in the hearts and minds of the people
marking her height regularly
on the golden doorjamb

what we can learn from the body

Lady Liberty's lips are sealed
leaving us to speak for ourselves,
knowing the wiser part
of the freedom of speech
is sometimes a silence
encouraging every voice
the conscience requires

what we can learn from the body
a tremendous concrete intellectual frame
must be wrapped in the humanity
of our symbols renewed
through the past
    in the present
for a future
we will live to see

    in the balance we achieve
    in the flexibility we design
    in the interdependence we learn
        as the rites
            wrights
            rights of Lady Liberty
        engendered in ourselves

what we can learn from the body
VIII. Amendments to the Constitution

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."
— Article I of the Amendments to the Constitution of the United States

“We found it wasn't just a matter of cosmetics. We just couldn't buy her a new dress and dab on some new makeup. We had to fix her internal problems.”
— Edward Cohen

remaking Lady Liberty is a process of reviewing original plans reworking original construction replacing original parts revising original designs and remarking, in an original way, Lady Liberty was lucky to last a hundred years with all her problems

but there are changes replacing Lady Liberty's missing curl and hiring a patinist to make the color conform replacing the tip of her nose gnawed off by the sulphuric spite of polluted air replacing the spiral stairs with more stable steps winding to the head of Lady Liberty
installing central air
to control the temperature inside Lady Liberty
and to avoid extremes

installing elevators
for those who cannot climb
to look down on what they're missing

replacing the 25 windows of the diadem
so that visitors may share
Lady Liberty's point of view more clearly

replacing the rusty iron bars
supporting the image with new and improved
stainless steel to do the same job longer

and then there are changes

now the torch of Lady Liberty is gold
     gilded 24-karat leaf
since money talks
telling the truth in our pockets full of change
     IN GOLD WE TRUST
the light of the flame is gone
     aglow below
     somewhere out of sight,
the lesson clearer, though lightless —
     illumination
comes from within no more
     for the torch shines
only in the beams
trained on the gold from the base

may the gold swiftly wear away
     with exposure to the elements,
down to Lady Liberty's true mettle:
copper —
     for good reason
the ancients called copper
     the metal of love
for the ore was common
    enough for the coin of the realm
gleaming and familiar with use
    valuable only in exchange
    and useless for weapons:

there is wisdom in the lesson the lowly penny teaches —
    treated well
Lady Liberty may last a thousand years.
IX. Pledge of Allegiance

"Over the chained bay waters Liberty"
— Hart Crane

"This is the last place.
There is nowhere else we need to go."
— Lew Welch

America, our country
the people and the land around us
one nation
indivisible
all Americans (like it or not)
one American like me
discovering a free country
right in the heart of America
knowing my country
is the land I live on
grounding my notion of a nation
in a place where I can stand
against the flag/
/rant abuses of the earth
under my feet and fingernails
WE LIVE HERE!!
and home is where you’re not afraid
to get your hands dirty
in the real work
you do for friends and neighbors —
a respect unafraid to criticize
knowing all could go straight to hell
if we will not stand
for what we stand for
and no republic worth a damn
unless it protects
the lives of everyone
who dares to stand for all of us
finding government in our own hearts
    and no more in pledges to rags,
windy old glory sheets drying streaks of blood,
    and no more in marble buildings
and monuments on the Potomac
where Washington began the tradition
    of throwing money around,
for we need the freedom to spend a dollar
without washing our hands of the smell
    of America printed in green
on the coast where the promise is still green
despite the axe in our hands
taking the liberty and leaving justice
to some power in ourselves
    and to claim no more
the right to judge
a diversity of people as dangerous
    for once
and for all —
one American like me
    finding myself
right in the heart of my country,
a boy seeking my place in the nation
    where I was born —
a realm seeking peace
strengthened by a constant vigil of humility —
a man loving the land
and seeking free companions
    somewhere in America —
I pledge allegiance.
X. Farewell Address

“Our union is now complete; our constitution composed, established and approved. You are now the guardians of your own liberties.”  
— Samuel Adams

“When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary.”  
— Thomas Paine

“If some of my judgments were wrong, and some were wrong, they were made in what I believed to be the best interests of the nation.”  
— Richard M. Nixon

in the U.S. Bar and Grill  
darkness  
the patrons watch TV  
while somebody else spotlights the torch  
the bartender turns to the screen  
grumbling  

“This really burns my ass.  
Somebody shoulda axed me  
to light that torch.”

“What can we do?  
Government got all the power.”  
says one of the bar belles

“Shit!  
I’m a goddamn citizen. I got power.  
Like John Hancock said,  
‘Give me Liberty, or give me Death’ —  
or give me a million dollars  
to keep me quiet.”

mixing a “Green Lady” —  
crème de menthe, clear stuff,  
whipped cream, & a cherry  
on a swizzle stick  
laughs and more

“Take a whole new revolution for you  
to light that torch.”  

“Liberty Specials” —  
buy one, free one
"Wasn’t that Patrick Henry?" says the fat guy at the bar’s end.

"At least, this can't last forever." says he with his head on the bar and the rest roar.

"Will all you assholes shut up? Some of us Americans want to see this shit!"

I'm listening but beer comes and beer goes

and I make my way to the back; over the urinal is a scrawl:

"Lady Liberty is Madonna in drag."

a goddess in green, still a virgin in the ancient sense

meaning a woman running her own life the way she wishes

a woman with a will of her own

I'm back to my barstool in time to hear some toasts

"Here's to Lady Liberty in the Harbor," says the fat guy

let us raise our glasses like torches to the All-American starless night across the rolling fields of the dark republic

let us toast the fire seized from Lady Liberty by the men who bought it for the Freedom Museum

let us toast the hills two centuries ago green with nothing but leaves become bills in golden calfskin wallets

let us toast to Lady Liberty whose work was clear as soon as the light shone forth
Meanwhile I'm writing my own toast
freehand on a bar napkin

Let us not find Lady Liberty
buried to her breasts on another planet
in the sand once our nation as Charleton Heston did
now run out
through the strait throat of the minute
we exalted
to get us to our jobs
making a living making payments
ON TIME

Let us stand on the shore
of the moment arriving
in the present
of Lady Liberty for all
for America
as indivisible as a nation from its people —
for founding the nation
endures as long as citizens are born
to believe
faith is not enough without actions —
America
not a product, a process
for the making
means more than the made
and the made must be made again
and the making will remain
the same great work.

"Hey! Here, listen to this!"
and I read by the bar's grainy light
over the blue buzz
and chitter-chatter static ceremonies on the screen

"Shit, man, what is that?" says the bartender,
"Why don't you just say what you mean?"
envoi

over the face of the waters
where the Greeks thought Atlantis lost,
a wind bears salt
to the shore,
the sand where we stand,
working to see
Liberty Island from the coast of America,
adrift among the waves.
About The Author

Eric Paul Shaffer is the author of five books of poetry, most recently Lāhaina Noon: Nā Mele O Maui, which received an "Award of Excellence" in the 2006 Ka Palapala Po'okela Book Awards presented yearly by the Hawai'i Book Publishers Association.

Shaffer received the 2002 Elliot Cades Award for Literature, an endowed literary prize given yearly to an established local writer in Hawai'i, and he won a fellowship to the 2006 Fishtrap Workshop and Retreat at Wallowa Lake, Oregon.


Burn & Learn, or Memoirs of the Cenozoic Era, his first novel, is forthcoming from Leaping Dog Press in 2009.

He lives with Veronica and two rambunctious teen-aged sister cats on a ridge overlooking Kalihi. He teaches at Honolulu Community College.
This edition is limited to 60 copies.

This is number 6.

[Signature]
Alexander Trocchi. Three Early Stories.
Tom Whalen. "What an Edifice of Artifice!": Russell H. Greenan's It Happened in Boston?
Dallas Wiebe. Home on the Range and Other Stories.
David Vancil. Night Photo.
Kirpal Gordon. Ghost in the Gone Realms.
Catherine Kasper. Hovering.
Tom Whalen. It's What We Do Best: Essays on War Films by Godard, Malick, and Carpenter.
Stefan Themerson. A Few Letters from the 1950s: Selected Correspondence with Lars Gustav Hellström and Bertrand Russell.
Nick Wadley. Man + Doctor: Drawings above the Horizontal.
Alfred Schwaid. The American Songbook.
Mel Freilicher. Stories We Tell Ourselves.