

Pugilism, or a Puncher's Chance December 5th, 2011: A while ago I got a heavy

bag for my workout room downstairs. I suppose I got the heavy bag (at least after a former student talked about boxing) because I had read, years ago, in Christopher Lasch's The True and Only Heaven, that humans need a challenge, need to struggle and to punch it out with the universe (he was trying to explain why communism and fascism appealed to people jaded by the progressive sureties of liberal society). Of course my heavy bag is an embarrassing affectation but, on the other hand, sometimes it is fun to just whale away on that thing. Rail against the world (or select individuals within it). As for "a puncher's chance," well, I would think that's obvious. It's a cold objective analysis of the prospects of Jack Fairfield. I thought all along the Tuggles Gap Motel would be the cover of this mix (it's where by brother Jeff and I stayed during the 1992 Blue Ridge 1,000 mile plus bike ride, a momentous time in both our lives for a variety of reasons – the kind of place in which Jeff thought you might find a coiled up rattlesnake under the bed). But then, in the midst of assembling the mix, Smoking Joe Frazier died and I am pleased to respectfully mark a great puncher's passing. On the back, that's me from the Tuggles Gap, not happy (we had scraggy steaks and Old Milwaukee (or was it old Old Milwaukee?) out of plastic mugs that night at the Tuggles Gap "Inn"). I was, no doubt, giving Jeff a hard time. On the left, in the khaki pants, facing off with the younger me, is the older me at the Ealing Broadway stop on London's Tube, in 2010, revisiting where I lived back in 1978 when I worked for Robin Corbett, MP (now Lord Corbett). Not sure which John I'm rooting for, not to mention whom I'm betting on. The young one thinks the old one is full of it, I know that. The old guy thinks the young guy is a bit raw. Anyway, Babe Ruth's birthplace (from a recent Baltimore trip) and a recent cornbread-quesadilla-chili dinner in Oakley round out the images from the world of a worn-out palooka.

ANGER: 1. Get better – mates of state: "Forget your politics for a while, Let the color schemes arrive." Nice thought. But the reason this one is here is "Everything's gonna get lighter, even if it never gets better." Keep slugging and protect your head. 2. Hey – the pixies: Probably pays not to look TOO closely into these lyrics but are we not indeed chained? Ok, really, I just wish I was as badass as this song. 3. S.T.H.D. – ladyhawk; well, the lyrics for this one are a well-kept secret but.... "*Ladyhawk* awakens in a trash-filled, 'morning after' apartment in East Vancouver, British Columbia....," from a review. From the lyrics: "Back to your city boy, back to your phony summer-loving town." Indeed. 4. Borne on the FM waves of the heart – against me! Bob Cotter turned me onto this one. I just love the lines "We took some pills to calm us down/Then we needed help to come back up." She sings that second line so sweetly. Those lines are preceded by "Anxiety, anxiety you give me no mercy/Grind my teeth smooth and flat in my sleep" 5. your little hoodrat friend – the hold steady: what do you mean you don't hear the anger? "She says it hurts, but it's worth it." The hold steady guy is going to be blasting until the end. 6. Maglite – wussy: the characters in this song are not indifferent to one another. Cross-bows and maglites. 7. Standing in the way of control - the gossip: to be honest, I'm not sure I like this song but I did think I deserved to be stomped on. 8. There goes my gun – the pixies: I'd never heard of the pixies before my son Tom gave me a track. I need to investigate further. 9. Think long – the mates of state: Ok, so I loved this song even when I thought they were saying "dig dog, dig dig dog, dig dig." Ok, so I'm an idiot. But I know a good tune when I hear it. Then I looked it up and I was lost: "On our picture shelves./ (Get on, or get out)./ Statues mocking me./ How am I supposed to feel? (Get on, or get out)./ How am I not put at ease?" **PAIN** 10. your beauty must be rubbing off – hawksley workman: Rachel didn't realize this one begins with a corpse from an

airplane crash. I did. But aren't the sentiments pretty? 11. Pretty voice – cloud cult: now the poor fellow who sings this knows a bit more about loss (lost a child at an early age). I totally love this band. 12. Anybody's ghost – the national: I'm trying to get away from the blatantly autobiographical but, ok, Ty, this one, sure. I didn't want to be anyone's ghost. "go out at night with your headphones on, again/and walk through the Manhattan valleys of the dead." My old friend John Atwood once had a gone-bad relationship where he wore headphones most of the time at home, somewhere in the Chelsea section of Manhattan, if I recall. I remember sending him a letter addressed to Atwood at the Church of the Blessed Headphones. 13. Ode to my family – the cranberries: ok, every mix gets a maudlin track, right? No? Woops. 14. Fight test – the flaming lips: I do have my weaknesses. Musically, I have ONLY my weaknesses. But this is probably the genesis for the mix. I think I had three cuts that mentioned fighting somehow (track 4 has the line "You have to fight to stay in control of the situation" and then there was Cloud Cult's Punchlines which didn't make the cut) but this was the most obvious one. I do love to dance to it. 15. Melt your heart – Jenny Lewis: ok, well I did say this side was pain. The opening bars always make me think I won't like it but then her voice ("nothing is ever as good as it was") carries it. "Melt your heart for good or for bad." Nice. **RECOVERY:** 16. Palomino – Mates of State: how can anyone resist this song? You do know you're not in hell, right John? 17. You'll be bright – cloud cult: for me, travel safely invokes the vulnerability of parenthood ("All the things you'll love/All the things that may hurt you") but generally this song is joyous and wise. I love the poor fellow who sings this (same guy as above). 18. Conduit for sale – pavement: this is such a bad ass song I think I'm immune here. And, damn, I AM trying.