

PETER GARLAND (b. 1952)

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

AKI TAKAHASHI, PIANO

80788-2

**The Birthday Party** (2014) 28:25

- 1 The Toasts (Remembrances) 8:37
- 2 Erik Satie Shows Up (Again) and Stays (Until the Bottle Is Finished) 7:56
- 3 The Birthday Cake 4:26
- 4 Afterwards: Autumn Evening (aki no kure) 7:26

**Blessingway** (2011–12) 15:15

- 5 (night song) 8:07
- 6 (daylight song) 7:08

**Amulet (After Roberto Bolaño)** for 4 pianos (2010) 20:42

- 7 I. 2:07
- 8 II. (in memoriam Shafi Hakim) 3:44
- 9 III. (march) 1:46
- 10 IV. 2:20
- 11 V. (Homage to Harold Budd) 4:51
- 12 VI. (2nd march) 2:28
- 13 VII. ("the echo of nothingness...") 3:27

TT: 64:22

The  
Birthday  
Party

Peter Garland  
Aki Takahashi, piano

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**O**N FIRST HEARING, THE PIANO MUSIC OF PETER GARLAND (b. 1952) creates a feeling of dislocation, then astonishment: It is so very different from the contemporary concert music we are familiar with. The composer's intent, his emotional directness is immediate—despite the unusual sound world and different sense of time which these pieces exhibit. Time itself appears to be suspended, and rhythm, melody, and harmony are transformed into quite different entities in a universe parallel to our own—as accessible but not quite of it!

The first of Garland's piano works to be recorded, *The Days Run Away* (1971), was written while Garland was a student at the newly formed California Institute of the Arts, which was founded in 1970—and soon to be located in Valencia, California. Garland entered the first class in 1970 along with such other young composers as Ingram Marshall, Charlemagne Palestine, and, a year later, Michael Byron—a composer of music as vivid as Garland's, who became a life-long friend. Cal Arts was a veritable hothouse of lively experimentation in those early years, and Garland absolutely flourished in the California environment after the stiffer, much more hierarchical Eastern musical one. He was able to study with two highly original and important composers, James Tenney and Harold Budd, the former a pioneer in applying scientific interests—he had worked at Bell Labs in New Jersey—to entirely new ways of composing acoustic and computer music.

Tenney, as well, was an original theorist and a monster pianist who was well known for his performances of Ives' sonatas and songs. Tenney was a gentle but demanding teacher who insisted on students' close listening to experimental composers such as Ruggles or Schoenberg in informal recitals. Budd, on the other hand, was a very different kind of composer and teacher whose looser, more meditative style of playing was more characteristic of other trends in the arts on the West Coast at the time. In the interdisciplinary atmosphere of Cal Arts, Garland had a number of fields of study open to him that strongly influenced his later work. In particular, Clayton Eshleman, a poet who had translated the Latin American poet César Vallejo, taught a class that also introduced Garland to many important poets in the modernist American tradition such as Ezra Pound and Charles Olson. The young composers also had hands-on experience in the gamelan (directed by the renowned Robert E. Brown), whose large-scale structural patterns and shimmering harmonies found their way into many of their works.

There was a whole new world of experimentation in the arts outside of Cal Arts—and Southern California in general—that Garland found liberating. In San Francisco, there was a long tradition of a particularly West Coast kind of writing going back to the Chicagoan Kenneth Rexroth, whose translations of Chinese and Japanese poetry reflected California's position on the eastern periphery of the Pacific Rim, while his own poetry and other writings reflected a free, almost anarchic, spirit later reflected in poets like Allen Ginsberg and other Beats. Somewhat younger San Francisco poets like Robert Duncan brought a new kind of voice to American poetry where technical virtuosity was combined with an open sexuality, esoteric references, and a very down-to-earth

political indignation with the status quo. And perhaps most influential of all for Garland was Gary Snyder, whose poetry and essays have a sensibility fusing a very personal identification with nature and certain kinds of Buddhist thought and practice that could only be produced by a born-and-bred son of the West Coast.

While it was almost inevitable that the West Coast—and California in particular, given its geographical position and cultural history—should have been the place that so stimulated Garland, it was a vibrant tradition of musical experimentation that particularly informed his early work. Henry Cowell's fascination with non-European music of all manner manifested itself in works of his own, using all sorts of "found" instruments as well as those from the Far East easily found in the stores of San Francisco. Of particular importance in the development of a unique genre of experimental music—apart from Cowell's seminal theoretical writings and his astonishing piano pieces—were his forays into a new kind of instrumental writing for the percussion ensemble. His *Ostinato Pianissimo* (1934), dedicated to Nicolas Slonimsky and first performed by John Cage's group in 1943, prepared the way for one of the most important developments in 20th-century music—the percussion ensembles led by Cage in collaboration with fellow composer Lou Harrison (1917–2003). This ensemble, fully developed after Cage moved to Seattle in 1938, first rehearsed and gave performances at the Cornish College for the Arts in Seattle, but also toured up and down the West Coast as well as throughout the country. The group included many non-traditional instruments, and performed a wide variety of music, including not just the experimental works of Harrison, Cowell, and Cage but adventurous composers rarely performed today like William Russell (1905–1992)—a pioneer of percussion writing in his own

right. A concert that took place at Mills College in Oakland, described by Henry Cowell in an article in an issue of *Modern Music*, included seventeen "percussors" playing, among other instruments, 13 oxen bells, 8 Chinese woodblocks, and a host of sound-making items like brake drums and the like that could be found in automobile junkyards or other unlikely places.<sup>1</sup>

The Cage percussion ensembles foreshadow those that play such an important role in Garland's own work from the very beginning such as *The Three Strange Angels* (1972–73). However, there is an important change of emphasis in both the early Garland mixed percussion—and piano—pieces: The repertoire of the Cage-Harrison ensemble was quite varied and in a variety of styles, while Garland's, on the other hand, very much reflect, both in sound and structure, his increasing fascination with Native American music and culture in general, both of California and the American Southwest. Apart from literary references in *Three Songs of Mad Coyote* (1973) and *Hummingbird Songs* (1974–76), there is something else going on here, a sense of strangeness, of an unfamiliarity or dislocation which has nothing in common with any kind of cultural appropriation so familiar to us in the arts today. It is much closer to a writer very close to Garland's heart, the Spanish emigré Jaime de Angulo, who came to California in 1905. While Garland did scholarly work editing and publishing de Angulo's transcriptions of California Indian songs many years later,<sup>2</sup> it was the Spaniard's writing itself—the stories and the style—to say nothing of the man's vivid life, later living in relative isolation at Big Sur, that so exercised his imagination and found its way into his own work.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Cowell, "Drums Along the Pacific," in *Modern Music* (New York, Nov.–Dec. 1940), pp. 46–49.

<sup>2</sup> Jaime de Angulo. *The Music of the Indians of Northern California*. Ed. by Peter Garland. Santa Fe, NM: Soundings Press, 1988.

And Garland's work has always been at one with his life—a peripatetic one including travels to Indonesia and Japan as well as long periods of time living in Santa Fe as well as in the Mexican states of Michoacán, Puebla, Oaxaca, and Veracruz. During this time he developed a musical language whose feeling for time and form—and an unusually reverberant soundscape that is not of this world—almost deliberately presents an alternative to Western concert music. With Garland's move to Santa Fe in 1980, all of the characteristics that make his percussion and piano music from the 70s so vivid—such as the almost harrowing sirens, lion's roar, piccolo, piano, and amplified ratchet of *Obstacles of Sleep* (1973)—find a particularly fertile ground for even more ambitious and emotionally intense work in the rich and varied cultural fabric of New Mexico. These include a subsequent series of brilliant piano pieces that lead to the three pieces on this CD. The same kind of fiery intensity and identification with the landscape, and non-Western ways of thinking that characterize the percussion music, are in these works—even the same structural and rhythmic characteristics as well as ways of approaching sound itself. The composition of these piano pieces was stimulated in no small way by the possibility of performances by a pianist like Aki Takahashi.

With Garland's return to his home state of Maine, where he now lives, his special relationship with Takahashi has continued—and further blossomed—leading to the composition of two of the three pieces on this recording. The three pieces on this CD, *The Birthday Party* (2014), *Blessingway* (2011–12) and *Amulet* (2010) are quite different in nature from much of Garland's previous writing for piano—as a solo instrument or in an ensemble. These new works are more lyrical than dramatic in feeling, the work of an older, more

mature artist, direct and deceptively simple, reminiscent in both mood and its modular structures to pieces written when Garland was at Cal Arts, such as *The Days Run Away* (1971). *The Birthday Party* in particular is the work of an artist looking back—pensive, even nostalgic, open to musical associations—such as the almost Satiesque waltz in the second movement that seems to come out of nowhere—a free approach to one's materials that one often finds in very late works of older composers. *The Birthday Party* is explicitly a study in both memory and loss; in Garland's own words in the introduction to the piece, *The Birthday Party* is not just a “toast” to Aki Takahashi, the dedicatee, on her birthday, but also to “. . . those who are still with us [and to] our friends and loved ones who are no longer alive.”

The work is unquestionably autumnal in feeling—and the reference to “autumn” is particularly relevant with respect to Aki, whose name can mean “autumn” in Japanese. The first movement of *The Birthday Party* is quiet, reflective in character, opening with tiny melodic/rhythmic units that progressively expand and contract as new notes are added (or occasionally deleted). Registral changes, antiphonal exchanges and overlapping between the different registers build up rich sonorities with doublings at the sixth at the conclusion of the movement. But the mood immediately changes with the arrival of Erik Satie himself—bon vivant and eccentric—an enormous musical influence on Garland and many of his contemporaries—and it should be no surprise (though of course it is!) to encounter a wistful waltz in the manner of Satie in this second movement, which is titled “Erik Satie Shows up (Again) And Stays (Until the Bottle is Finished).”

Garland displays his own wit, not only by the alternation of different meter changes within the basic triple meter of the waltz, but by his use of sly tempo indications that highlight his suspicion, if not disdain, for academia and stereotyped musical tropes. At one point in the movement he pokes fun at the establishment with the somewhat sarcastic but pointed performance direction, “bureaucratic (but not too academic!)”, and more genially at the long fermata at the close of the movement reassures us that “everyone likes a happy ending.”

The birthday cake itself is the center of attention in the third movement of the piece that bears the same name. As befits the occasion, the piece proceeds at a genial, almost ambling pace, at what is sometimes described in music as a “walking” tempo, with a lovely melodic idea—expanding, contracting, always truncated, growing into one continuous, flowing line as the movement develops before ending in the same almost rhythmically uneven manner with which it opened (have the guests already had a bit too much to drink?). But the succeeding—and final—movement of *The Birthday Party* finds the guests contemplating the close of the day—and the end of the party—in a state of peaceful repose, in one of Garland’s loveliest creations, titled “Afterwards: Autumn Evening (aki no kure),” referring again to the Japanese meaning of Aki’s name. Opening with block chords in the treble answered antiphonally by a rich, sonorous, if fragmented, melodic line in the bass, this final movement fades into nothingness, the bass dropping out entirely, as sustained treble chords slowly fade into the autumn evening.

In his introduction to the score Garland says *Blessingway*, written for the Italian pianist Emanuele Arciuli, takes its title from a Navajo ceremony, but its use here must be seen as reflecting a purely personal association of some

kind for Garland rather than any literary or musical connection to the ceremony in the piece. It is generally broad and sonorous in character, with subtly changing chordal melodies in the right hand over prominent bass parts with their own independent rhythmic profile; a resonant field is created between treble and bass not unlike that which one finds in much of Garland’s percussion music. Percussionist John Lane, in an excellent analysis of Garland’s *Nana & Victorio* has described the “sonic wealth” and “richly tonal” character of the Native American instruments Garland uses, from “. . . water drums to peyote rattles, to Pueblo drums that are as finely made and richly tonal as Chinese ones,” and shows as well how “these indigenous musical resonances create a distinct sonic landscape in Garland’s music.”<sup>3</sup> Garland himself in his introduction to the piece describes the importance that resonance plays in *Blessingway*:

In both movements, I enjoyed working with the constant and slight variation of the chords, where changing only one of the two notes can completely alter the sonic or emotional resonance. Almost always those shifting notes occur inside the chords, so there is a kind of multiple layer of melodic activity. Thus the character of the chord and its melodic and emotional function is not solely defined by the outer notes, which are most often octaves. As with most of my piano music, resonance is as important as melody (and both much more so than any supposed harmonic function).

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<sup>3</sup> John Lane, “The Percussion Music of Peter Garland,” (London: Rutledge, 2014), p. 69.



While both movements of *Blessingway* contrast treble and bass in ways that simultaneously reinforce the acoustic possibilities of combining both lines despite—or because of—the asymmetric rhythmic patterns of the bass, the character of the two sections is substantially different. The two movements are titled “night song” and “daylight song.” The first movement presents a deceptively simple melody set within chords that almost imperceptibly shift with respect to pitch, rhythm, and voicing. Not long after “night song” begins, rather astonishing ascending pentatonic scale passages occur in the bass that seem to come out of nowhere—or as Garland writes below them in the score: “The voice of the earth is my voice.” Another striking interpolation that is equally arresting occurs later in the movement—sonorous chords in the treble with a strong melodic profile in counterpoint against an equally prominent bass line—before the movement ends as gently as it began, fading into nothingness.

The second movement, “daylight song,” while again essentially chordal in nature, has a vastly different, darker, emotional character. Garland is quite explicit about the personal as well as musical reasons for this change in his introduction:

There is one other thing that occurred to me after I finished the second movement; and which I want to mention, because if I don’t, no one will probably ever catch this. That concerns my use of clusters. Of course any such use brings to mind the influence of Henry Cowell, which I readily acknowledge (Bartók was right: somehow Henry Cowell almost set down a “copyright” on the concept). Also I am working with that same idea of inner voicings in the chords that I’ve

previously discussed. What struck me though was an influence from American blues music, and what certain critics (was it Robert Palmer?, I’m not sure) have termed a “dirty” aesthetic in regard to the use of distortion, fuzz tones, etc. in blues guitar playing. Instead of the “clean” sound of classical and folk stylings, this “dirty” sound gives a gritty, raw, emotionally powerful edge to the music. So in some places in the second movement I have, with my use of clusters, deliberately “fuzzed up” the sound of these chords—for the same expressive purpose. Giving greater grit, depth, and resonance to what are otherwise relatively simple melodic phrases. My realization of this came as a pleasant surprise, even to me.

Emotionally this was not a particularly easy piece. It came with the onset of darkness and winter, and during a period of personal and musical discouragement, and some physical problems. I finished it on the day before my 60th birthday, and the whole creative process was a kind of “blessingway” for me.

*Amulet (After Roberto Bolaño)* for 4 pianos (2010) was written for—and dedicated to—Aki Takahashi. Takahashi herself consecutively recorded all four parts before they were mixed down. Garland’s original concept, explained in his introduction to the piece, was “. . . that these are not four separate pianos; but rather they form one big piano, the sum of their parts.” The title *Amulet* references to a high degree a novel of the same name by the Chilean/Mexican writer Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003), particularly its last five pages. Garland explains that “. . . the final sentence and the very last word [of the novel] is ‘amulet.’” *Amulet* is in large part a humorous work, albeit one with a dark

side. As Garland describes it, again in his introduction to the piece, a comparison to some of the great comic actors of the silent screen era can help explicate some of the contradictions of his piece:

As the films of Chaplin and Keaton or the plays of Samuel Beckett show us, pathos can be the “other side” of humor—which differentiates it from tragedy, which lacks that humorous aspect. So there is an element of humor and (restrained) melodrama in this music.

Earlier in the introduction, Garland describes the event in the novel that appears to have most exercised his imagination, and influenced the shape and emotional character of his piece:

. . . a sudden and intense note of deep pathos [occurs] at the very end, where the hallucinating main character “sees” a ghost army of young people, a whole generation (Bolaño’s) of Latin American youth, marching into the abyss. And as they are marching, they are singing, not only about their sacrifice, but about “the love, the desire and the pleasure they shared with one another,” and “about courage and mirrors, desire and pleasure.” Bolaño ends his novel with the words: “And that song is our amulet.”

Garland, to a remarkable degree, has himself “mirrored” the shape of *Amulet* to the Bolaño novel itself, though a wholly different level of personal associations and memories create other levels of structure underlying the piece. Two internal sections, the second and the fifth, are homages, respectively, to Garland’s friend Shafi Hakim and his teacher, Harold Budd. In addition, two embedded marches within the piece create yet another structural counter-

point to the very rich design of the piece. The latter is also a quite new element to Garland’s work here—the introduction of genres from the popular vernacular much as one finds in the “simple” later work of Henry Cowell in works such as the *Hymn and Fuguing Tunes*—an aesthetic that is clearly congenial to Garland at this point in his life.

—Eric Richards

*Composer Eric Richards has known Peter Garland for some 40 years, and reviewed his edition of Jaime de Angulo’s The Music of the Indians of Northern California for American Book Review. A recording of his music, the bells themselves, is on New World Records, and his works are distributed by Frog Peak Music.*



Peter Garland and Aki Takahashi, Shizuoka, Japan, 2010. Photo by Esperanza Esquivel.

Born in 1952 in Portland, Maine, **Peter Garland** was one of the original students at Cal Arts in 1970, where his principal teachers were Harold Budd and James Tenney. From 1971 to 1991 he edited and published *Soundings* magazine and press, where he printed the work of four generations of mostly American composers. As an editor and essayist he played a pivotal role in the rediscovery and re-evaluation of such composers as Conlon Nancarrow, Silvestre Revueltas, Lou Harrison, Paul Bowles, Dane Rudhyar, Harry Partch and James Tenney, among others. He helped bring back the Pacifica recordings of Jaime de Angulo's *Old Time Stories* and published a book on de Angulo's work with Northern California Indian musics.

During the 1970s he lived mostly in California, along with two extended stays in Mexico (including extensive travels in southern Mexico and Guatemala): first in the Zapotec weaving village of Teotitlán del Valle in Oaxaca; and later in the Purépecha village of Tocuaro, Michoacán, where he lived with the family of renowned maskmaker Juan Horta (1940–2006). He lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico all through the 1980s, where he directed his own performing ensemble. Highlights of their decade together were performances of his shadow puppet/dance theater spectacle, *The Conquest of Mexico*, in Santa Fe and Los Angeles. Years of exposure to Native American and Hispanic musics, both in New Mexico and the greater Southwest, were also a major influence. In 1991 he left the U.S., embarking on a 42-month journey to twelve countries on five continents—the so-called Gone Walkabout years. Highlights include the study of Australian Aboriginal music and culture at the University of Adelaide, where he was guest composer; collaboration with the Red Mole Theater in New Zealand; and a four-month residency in Japan, where he traveled and

researched popular festivals, and the influences of Buddhism and Nature in Japanese aesthetics. In 2002 he had a similar residence in the Philippines, where he studied popular festivals, indigenous musical traditions, and the influence of Spanish colonization.

In 1997 he left the U.S. again, moving to Cholula, Puebla. He subsequently lived for three years in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, a center of jarocho culture, where he studied jarocho music with the late Evaristo Silva. He also did research among the Nahua Indians in the Sierra of Zongolica. From 2001 to 2005 he lived in Oaxaca, where his research focused on music and fiestas in the Mixteca region and on music and fiestas in the Zapotec and Mixe villages in the Sierra Norte. He developed a special friendship with the brass band and community of Totontepec, Mixes. After seven-and-a-half years of nearly continuous research on Mexican music, he moved back to the coast of Maine, where he has lived since 2005, continuing his ongoing life's work as a composer.

Since her student days at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts & Music, **Aki Takahashi** has been active in performing new music by such composers as Messiaen, Boulez, Xenakis, Takemitsu, and her contemporaries. Her landmark recording, *Aki Takahashi—Piano Space*, featuring twenty contemporary piano works, received the Merit Prize at the Japan Art Festival in 1973. Her series of Erik Satie concerts (1975–77, Tokyo), conceived and produced by Kuniharu Akiyama, triggered a Satie boom throughout Japan. In 1980 she was invited by Morton Feldman to become a Creative Associate of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts at the State University of New York at Buffalo. John Cage, Morton Feldman, Peter Garland, Isang Yun, and her



brother Yuji Takahashi, to name a few, have all composed works especially for her. In a project conceived and performed by Aki Takahashi, *The Hyper Beatles*, 47 composers from around the world were commissioned to create works inspired by various Beatles tunes. Since 2007, she has been embarked on a series of Schubert recordings for the Camerata label, the sixth of which will be released in 2017.

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*Another Sunrise*. Aki Takahashi, piano & harpsichord; Essential Music, Charles Wood & John Kennedy, directors. Mode Records 110.  
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*Love Songs*. Heather Heise, piano; Carla Kihlstedt, violin; Roy Malan, violin; Timb Harris, violin; Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio. Tzadik TZ 8012.  
*Matachin Dances*. Included on *The Complete 10-Inch Series from Cold Blue*. John Tenney, violin; Ronald Erikson, violin; Peter Garland, gourd rattles. Cold Blue Music CB0014.  
*Nana + Victorio*. William Winant, percussion; Julie Steinberg, piano. Avant AVAN 12.  
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*Three Strange Angels*. Included on *Cold Blue*. Jack Loeffler, percussion; Peter Garland, piano. Cold Blue Music CB0008.  
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*Waves Breaking on Rocks (Elegy for All of Us)*. John Duykers, tenor; Santa Fe New Music; John Kennedy, conductor; Aki Takahashi; piano. New World Records 80716.

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There are a lot of people to thank for this CD. First of all, *Amulet* was commissioned for Aki Takahashi by the Shizuoka Concert Hall and the Shizuoka City Cultural Promotion Foundation in Japan. They were very kind to us all through the process of premiering this work, from the invitation for me to attend and for

the hospitality they showed to me and my wife. I would also like to thank the four performers who gave the world premiere, including Aki's brother Yuji.

*Blessingway* was commissioned by and is dedicated to the Italian pianist Emanuele Arciuli, with funding from the Aeroporti di Puglia in Bari, Italy. He premiered it in the U.S. under the auspices of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, which, given my less than positive relationship with that organization during my years in Santa Fe, was bittersweet. Thank you, Emanuele.

The title of *Amulet* is taken from the novel of the same name by the late Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003). The music I wrote refers specifically to the last five pages of this wonderful book. The voice of a generation. The work as a whole is dedicated to Aki Takahashi; in addition there are two other dedications. One is to my dear friend Shafi Hakim (1944–2010) from San Francisco, whom I first met in 1976. When my personal safety net collapsed in 1991 and I had nowhere to go, Shafi and Christie Hakim opened their home to me. Prior to that we were always great friends, sharing music, food, and illuminating times. The Bay Area will never be the same for me without Shafi. The other dedication is to my teacher Harold Budd, an impeccable musician and person, whose tastes, opinions, and music never cease to surprise and inspire me. A lifelong teacher and friend.

I am grateful to Eric Richards for the notes to this CD. Besides being a composer and friend whom I greatly admire, Eric has made me the beneficiary over the past decade of the downsizing of his personal library. I have received remarkable books of American poetry that I had never seen before. Thank you, Eric.

Thank you, Paul Tai, for believing in my music, and for the amiable way you have of keeping people happy and things running smoothly. Thank you also for bringing Aki and me together for this project.

Thank you to Jim Fox, my composer buddy and Cold Blue comrade, for his design work, which surprises and delights as always. Thank you also to Judith

Sherman and her recording team. It's a real privilege to have the best people working with you. And thanks to Masami Tomihisa, our page turner, for her very positive contribution to the recording sessions.

Thank you, Aki Takahashi. I say that in the deepest way I know—with music. You have not only singlehandedly kept my music alive, you have kept me alive. During the recording sessions I commented at one point that I would only write music that was so intimate and personal—for you.

Thank you to my wife, Esperanza. You keep me going—us going—in every way.

—Peter Garland, March 2017

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Francis Goelet (1926–1998), *In Memoriam*

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