

God and Man in New Orleans

by [Michael Shindler](#) (February 2025)



Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Drawing Room at No. 16 Cheyne Walk
(Henry Treffry Dunn, 1882)

"I wish to God I could meet her tomorrow. She seems lovely. Just the girl for me. But you know how busy I am," said Bernard.

Reginald, who was sitting across the room from Bernard, looked at him. Then without moving he looked past him as if there were a window into a lost world of wonders just behind his head with an envoy from that lost world beckoning him to join. "It's funny you should say that," he said.

Bernard's interest was piqued. "Why's it funny?" he asked.

Reginald began, "Do you remember that time I went to New Orleans with Sam for the Practicum Society's Spring conference?"

Bernard did not remember that time, but nodded anyways. He usually nodded. He was too busy to remember such things.

Reginald continued, "Well, Sam and I were staying at the St. Jamies. He booked it. It was very quaint in its way: small, cheap, delightful. Not far from Bourbon Street. But not too close either. Pool like a thimble and understaffed. You can imagine. In any case, because I had a lot of work to get in that week—tight deadlines I couldn't get around—what I would do is spend the days and evenings with Sam et al at the conference and sightseeing. And when we'd get back to the hotel, I'd leave him to his dreams and spend two hours or so in the lobby grinding through my work.

"It was a small lobby, but well-appointed: big middlebrow paintings, an antique set of Casanova's diaries, decanters full of colored water resembling whiskey. You get the idea.

"Certainly, I didn't get much sleep in this way. But that's what coffee and nicotine are for. And in any case, I was getting my work done. On the night of the third day of the conference, I was working against a tight morning deadline for a whitepaper on a municipal proposal to prohibit food carts from using polystyrene containers. The usual sort of stuff. It was very late. But I still had a few more rounds of edits left and hadn't even gotten to the footnotes.

"My attention flagged. I let my eyes wander to the big window looking out onto the street. Late-night revelers, tourists, and locals passed by. And just when I was about to turn back to my work, there passed what looked to be a middle-aged homeless man.

"He smiled and waved at me. And not wanting to be impolite—you know how I never want that—and in the good humor of exhaustion

besides, I waved back. He pointed to my laptop and asked—the outer walls of the hotel were very thin and the lobby was very small so it wasn't strange that I could hear him sitting inside— 'Working?' He had a charismatic voice. He sounded like someone who knew how to network.

"I nodded and shrugged my shoulders. He seemed upset and shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'Enough is enough. Close the laptop. Have some fun!' I gestured with my palm and made a slight bow to show I understood his position and even agreed to an extent. Then I said, 'Soon!' After that, he began to walk off and I turned my eyes back to my laptop. But I was in for a surprise.

"In a moment or two, right there in the lobby, right beside my little table and the decanters of colored water, there stood the homeless man. 'Oh, come on, it's Friday night!' he said. 'What's the point of coming here just to sit and work?'

"I looked up at him. Strangely, up-close, he was remarkably handsome. Still, definitely homeless, of course. But as far as the homeless go—he was fit, lantern-jawed, with a bit of stubble and bright eyes. With a new lateral incisor and a suit, he'd look like a CEO on a soap opera. I sat and looked at him. And then I wondered how he'd gotten in. Quaint as it was, this place, the St. Jamies, typically had someone at the front desk at night, the same that would usually set out breakfast in the lobby.

"I glanced toward the front desk. The usual someone wasn't there. Then I turned back to the homeless man, who was waiting for a response. 'Oh, don't worry I'll be done soon,' I said. But then he said, 'You know, I'm God.'

"I looked up at him. Clearly, I thought, he'd suffered some sort of mental break. I suppose that explains how such a handsome and charismatic person could become homeless. Still, this was my first time encountering someone suffering from

this particular delusion. Honestly, I was tempted to humor him—you know me—so I did. ‘It’s a pleasure to meet you,’ I said.

“He smiled and I can’t emphasize enough how, despite missing a lateral incisor—how remarkably handsome he was. ‘You don’t believe me,’ he said. And then even more remarkably, he said, ‘I’ll prove it to you. Go on your internet and look up *Unicorn of the End*.’ I had no idea what he was talking about, but the name of the thing seemed so enchantingly ridiculous that I did.

“Eventually, after I’d succeeded in pulling up *Unicorn of the End*—which turned out to be some sort of animated film from the early ’80s about a very special unicorn—he had me skip forward through the film until we found a particular scene, in which I think the protagonist met God, or some other elevated entity within the scheme of the narrative, and was saved.

“After we’d finished the scene, he paused the video and I looked up. He was standing upright, beaming proudly. ‘See, that’s me,’ he said. Needless to say, I was at a loss for a moment. On the one hand, I didn’t see how that was him and didn’t want to just go ahead and agree. And on the other hand, I was alone in an unstaffed lobby at 2 a.m. with what seemed to be a deranged homeless person. After a moment, I simply said, ‘Oh, thank you for showing me. Now, I see. Thank you. But I really have to get back to my work now. It’s getting late.’

“He looked down at me and it was entirely clear that he did not believe the scales had fallen from my eyes. He seemed hurt and looked as if he were ruminating upon a better scheme to convince me of his identity.

“Then he spoke again, ‘Well, let me at least offer you something. Instead of work, at this very hotel, I have a nice girl upstairs. One of my sisters, in fact. I’d love for you to

meet her. I can assure you that she would love you. I'm sure it would be a pleasure. A welcome break from all this work of yours and your laptop.

"At this point, I didn't quite know what to think. At first, I thought, perhaps he was actually a sort of pimp, or was one before his ostensible mental break. The whole situation seemed extraordinary. Of course, I politely declined, saying, 'No thank you. That's a very generous offer and she sounds delightful. But there are no pleasures of the flesh that could compare with the pleasure of finishing my work.'

"Now, the homeless man looked truly dismayed, almost heartbroken. A part of me wanted to humor him out of sheer sympathy. Then he said, 'When I created man, I set him in a garden of wonders. But that was not good enough. So, I made woman and when she ate of the forbidden fruit and brought some to the man, he ate it too. He was willing to forsake everything for her. So, I punished him with work. But now he'd forsake woman for that.'

"After his speech, he looked away. He wouldn't look me in the eyes. He turned his face from me. I didn't know what to say. Downcast, he exited the lobby. And as the doors closed, I think I said or tried to say, 'Good night.'

"The next morning, in the very same lobby, breakfast was being served and I went down. After I got my coffee, I spotted the attendant setting out some pastries and said, 'You know, last night I was working down here and there was a homeless man claiming to be God.' He didn't seem surprised. He didn't even look up from the pastries, which he was rearranging with a pair of tongs.

"As he carefully shifted the position of a pistachio croissant, he said, 'Oh, really? I wish I could've been there. It's a shame—I was too busy.'"

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