

Night Journey 78: *The Age of Idolatry When the Stars No Longer Shine on America*

In a speech at the Center for American Progress, the core beliefs of which include promoting a government that champions the common good over narrow self-interests, Vermont's independent senator Bernie Sanders lambasted billionaires, whom he believes control the American political process and economy through their financial influence: "The oligarchy in this country, whose greed is insatiable, is destroying Lincoln's vision of America, is destroying our vision of America, and is moving us in a direction of the few, by the few, for the few." (*Evan Halper, LA Times*) Lincoln, a man of incorruptible integrity, believed in equality as the fundamental idea upon which our nation had been built, and he believed that the government should champion the common good over self-interest.

Money has come to determine who governs and controls the quality of life of our country's citizens. It has perverted and corrupted democratic ideals and human morality to the point where the accumulation of power and wealth has become a moral obligation, despite the inequities it inflicts on others less fortunate. In our country, elected officials are disproportionately influenced by the financial contributions of the wealthiest individuals and corporations. Our elected officials no longer represent and serve the interests of their constituents; instead, they serve the special interests of the very wealthy, who contribute the most to keep them in their elected office of privilege and power. Our democracy permits one person one vote, and elected government officials are obliged to represent and serve the needs of the majority. However, in reality, our government is influenced by and serves the interests of the wealthy, and their money ensures that their vote counts more and that policy and legislation is passed to favor their interests.

The American Dream is in fact individualistic rather than socialistic. Money is worshipped and accumulated as much as possible, and at any cost to society or its interests. Money is power because of the political influence it can buy. As Kings have ruled by divine right, the wealth of American oligarchs seems to be made and accumulated by divine right. God has chosen and favored the rich who are therefore entitled to preserve their wealth and, through it, rule our country. Gone are the days of men of moral character such as Jonas Salk, who chose not to patent his vaccine for polio. It is estimated that he forfeited around seven billion dollars in profit with this decision. Salk's actions mark a rare occasion when humanitarianism triumphed over base greed, such as that displayed by Nirmal Mulye, chief executive of Nostrum Laboratories. Mulye more than quadrupled the price of a bottle of nitrofurantoin, an antibiotic which appears on the World Health Organization's list of essential medicines. According to Mulye, he had priced the product according to market dynamics, stating, "I think it is a moral requirement to make money when you can . . . to sell the product for the highest price."

The figure in *Night Journey 78* is an idol, signifying the love of money. It is a fusion of Venus de Milo and the head of George Washington as depicted on the American one-dollar bill. It is a false idol, a representation of the ultra-rich, who destroy all upon whom they prey.