

Lenny Bruce Died Today

“M.S. Henry”

That was the headline. August 3, 1966. Lenny Bruce *could* have died on the same day as Jesus. He didn't, but he could have. They had a lot in common, those two. Jesus came to save “mankind.” Lenny, he came to maybe not save the human race but at least save the night. Night was Lenny's day. He worked while others slept. Jesus of course worked night *and* day, maybe because he felt more pressed for time. And he knew how much time he had. Lenny didn't. He was like the rest of us.

Jesus, he was the light of the world (the Light of the World) and drove away the night. Maybe that's how he and Lenny were different: Jesus lit up the world; Lenny only lit up the night. (Lenny was smaller than Jesus, metaphysically speaking.) And Jesus came to lighten people's load. Lenny, he came to make light of people's load. His, too. His first, probably. On the surface, Lenny seemed frivolous; Jesus made everyone else seem frivolous. Lenny was like Jesus-in-reverse, or Jesus-inside-out: Jesus wore his serious side like clothes; Lenny clothed his seriousness in jokes—dirty, dirty jokes, which made Jesus sometimes easier to read but Lenny easier to listen to.

And Jesus became a gadfly, like Socrates—and got killed in the process, like Socrates. Lenny was also a gadfly, and of course he died for his troubles, too. Drugs killed Socrates and drugs killed Lenny. Well, really it was people, in both cases—powerful people, but the drugs, they helped. At least the drugs got rid of the people. Socrates of course didn't need drugs to get through the night, except some wine maybe. Drink and talk, drink and talk, just like Lenny. And they both did a lot of sex, too. Socrates with boys, Lenny with any woman he could get his hands on—and the more the merrier.

Lenny liked group sex. Jesus probably would have liked group sex but that would have posed a problem, PR-wise. He knew (he always knew beforehand) how important women were going to be to his mission. Lenny of course was clueless about women, like Freud. So both—both Lenny and Jesus—used women as a means to an end, although Lenny's means were meaner. At any rate, Jesus didn't do sex—officially—although there are still those questions about Mary Magdalene.

Jesus of course didn't get to check out on drugs, like Lenny or Socrates. Jesus probably could have used some drugs, hanging up there on the cross all day. Of course Lenny, he was also tortured, but more slowly—by the cops, DA's, judges, but mostly by Lenny.

Jesus, Lenny, and Socrates were all highly moral (Freud thought morality was a bunch of crap). Too moral maybe for their own good. It's best not be too moral, too openly moral. It's better to talk the talk. Walking the walk can get you killed. Talking the talk can get you lots, like some interviews maybe, which can lead to jobs, careers, elected office, maybe even some good sex once in a while.

In the end, Lenny died, Jesus died, Socrates died. Well, maybe not Jesus. Of the three, I like Socrates best. Jesus and Lenny, they seemed pretty miserable, although in different ways. Lenny seemed to have more fun in his misery. I don't think anyone ever accused Jesus of having fun. So for me it would be Lenny, Socrates, and Jesus, in that order, to spend an evening with, and maybe have group sex. OK, not Jesus. But Lenny for sure.

—published in *American Letters & Commentary*, 2006, under “M.S. Henry”