



THERE'S A STARMAN WAITING IN THE SKY

JEFFREY R. DI LEO, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

"The time," said David Bowie to William Burroughs, "is five years to go before the end of the earth."

Bowie was explaining to Burroughs some of the ideas underlying his fifth studio album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, which had been released about a year and half earlier.

The two were meeting for the first time at the behest of Craig Copetas, who was conducting a two-way interview of them for Rolling Stone Magazine.

Burroughs was nearing 60 at the time and Bowie was a few months shy of 27 — the mythical age of death of Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain, Amy Winehouse, and many other prominent musicians.

The last track on *Ziggy Stardust*, "Rock 'n' Roll Suicide," grimly recalls the fate of the 27 Club:

*You're too old to lose it, too young to choose it
And the clock waits so patiently on your song
You walk past the café but you don't eat when you've lived too long
You're a rock 'n' roll suicide*

Though Bowie would far outlive the 27 Club, Ziggy does not.

He is taken by the rock 'n' roll death drive.

Sigmund Freud, who coined the notion of the *death drive*, regarded it as a mediation of Friedrich Nietzsche's affirmation of the will and Arthur Schopenhauer's negation of it.

But this is not the death drive that took Ziggy.

It was one tempered more by Lacanian than Freudian thought.

Slavoj Žižek, the great contemporary Lacanian philosopher, argues that the death drive should not be confused with the return to the inorganic absence of any life-tension or with the craving for self-annihilation. For him, "the death drive, on the contrary, is *the very opposite of dying*, it is a name for the 'undead' eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain."

After the *Ziggy Stardust* tour, the Ziggy character disappeared as quickly as he appeared — giving way to the titular character of Bowie's follow-up album, *Aladdin Sane* (1973).

I'd like to think though that fifty years after his disappearance from the Bowie tour stage, he lives on in a variation of the "undead" eternal life described by Žižek — rising and falling in the endless repetitive cycle of the spinning of the well-worn black vinyl of *Ziggy Stardust*.



The setting for their meeting was Bowie's home in London, which we are told was decorated in a science-fiction mode.

A huge painting by an artist who was a cross between Salvador Dalí and Norman Rockwell hung over a plastic sofa.

Lunch, reports Copetas, was a Jamaican fish dish served with avocados stuffed with shrimp and a Beaujolais nouveau. It was prepared by a Jamaican in the Bowie entourage and served by, what he describes as "two interstellar Bowieties."

The Starman himself was wearing three-tone NASA jodhpurs — those full-length trousers, worn for horseback riding, that are close-fitting below the knee and have reinforced patches on the inside of the leg.

*Keep your 'lectric eye on me babe
Put your ray gun to my head
Press your space face close to mine, love
Freak out in a moonage daydream oh! yea!*

(Bowie, "Moonage Daydream")

Burroughs, who lived at the time in a two-room flat in Piccadilly and shared a cab with Copetas to Bowie's home, must have thought he landed on another planet — the glam psychedelic one where the *Starman-in-the-sky-who-would-like-to-come-and-meet-us-but-thinks-he'd-blow-our-minds* lives.

Their meeting was on November 17, 1973 — two years and two days after the first recording sessions for *Ziggy Stardust* had ended.

While their meeting was not as significant in literary history as say the dinner Horace Liveright had with Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce on January 4, 1922, where by the end of dinner that night, Liveright had retained the services of Pound as his European "book scout" for \$500 a year, and had agreed to publish *The Waste Land* for a \$150 advance and the unexpurgated text of *Ulysses* for a \$1,000 advance, for devotees of early 1970s music and literature, it belongs in the same conversation.

And speaking of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Burroughs just happens to compare it to some of Bowie's writing.

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